

St. THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX: FROM LITTLE SISTER TO BIG MOTHER
A FEMINIST APPROACH TO HER LIFE AND WORK

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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
Marianna Kirwan

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From The Poetry of St. Thérèse of Lisieux translated by Donald Kinney, OCD
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ABSTRACT

ST. THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX: FROM LITTLE SISTER TO BIG MOTHER A FEMINIST APPROACH TO HER LIFE AND WORK

by

Marianna Kirwan

Focusing on the writings of St. Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-1897), her autobiography, The Story of a Soul, and to a lesser degree on her letters, conversations, and poetry, this work examines her impact on church history and her leadership as a woman, using historical study as the methodology.

This project proposes that St. Thérèse's articulation of her mission has become a vision for church reform and renewal, and that a proper appropriation of her contributions can enable the church to benefit from a feminist model of leadership.

The translations of Thérèse's work by André Combes, Guy Gaucher, and John Clarke have been very helpful as well as Donald Kinney's work with her poetry. Their scholarship is integrated with a feminist perspective to bring Thérèse's writings to bear on problems facing the contemporary church regarding the leadership of women.

Using the writings of Carol Gilligan, In a Different Voice, and Carol Lakey Hess, Caretakers of Our Common House, Thérèse's writings and the church's response to her "little way of childhood" are inspected through a feminist perspective, and an ethic of care.

Rather than relegating St. Thérèse to the closet of spirituality and missions, where the hierarchy of the church is more comfortable with women, this work brings her out

into the theological world of the politics of leadership and women's ordination. Her influence upon the agenda of Second Vatican Council and the implications of being a Doctor of the Church are addressed. By taking a critical look at the selections of scripture that inspired her and informed her development of a theology of love and her mission, "Little Way" of childhood, Thérèse is hailed as teacher, theologian, and as one who brings a fresh approach to the roles men and women are forging to face the work of the church in the twenty-first century.

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Thanks be to God for these many blessings and for Thérèse who captivated me with a sense of wonder and hope. If she could be made a Doctor of the Church for her work after her death, then surely I could use my life to pursue the dream to become a doctor of ministry. I hope that those who read this may want to read and reread her Story of a Soul.

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CHAPTER 1

AN INTRODUCTION TO ST. THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX

The Problem

This project focuses on the writings of St. Thérèse, to examine her influence on and interpret her contribution to recent church history. Specifically, her influence upon the church leadership during of the Second Vatican Council and following will be examined, in order to highlight and thereby call attention to a woman's contribution, (which is distinctly a woman's perspective), not only long absent from direct influence within the hierarchy of the leadership of the church but also almost impossible for the patriarchal leadership to recognize and acknowledge as a feminist model of leadership for the church. The problem is the relegation of Thérèse to footnotes with her impact circumscribed within the field of spirituality and missions.

This is precisely the problem. The church's ambivalence about women's place in the sacred halls of leadership and decision making has led to real loss for the church and society. By not valuing women's genius the contributions that women have made are missed, misunderstood or mislabeled.

By keeping women out of the mainstream of leadership men are not only not used to the way women think but over time they become deaf to the voices of over half of humankind. Furthermore, the arrogance and ignorance of this stance is a significant problem for the church because the energy expended to perpetuate this kind of a lie is enormous and siphons off immeasurable opportunities for benefits to all.

Then along comes Thérèse with her gifts which the church has recognized in the areas of spirituality and mission but has failed to see as a distinctly woman's approach to church reform, revitalization and renewal.

Importance of the Problem

This unwillingness or inability to appreciate and acknowledge the contribution of women and their work within the area of theology is a crucial aspect of the work that must be addressed by the church. Models for revitalization are needed. Models for women's leadership are necessary. The contributions of women that have been adopted by the church must be documented, studied, and included into the history of our common work together.

The church which professes the central importance of community, justice, and love has some catching up to do. There are repairs to be attended to because failing to honor women's models of leadership and the gifts women bring to the church can be tolerated no longer. Justice is not served. Love is lost and community is fractured. For the church to continue down this road of misogyny is to be guilty of the sin of hypocrisy.

My passion for the pursuit of truth in the case of Thérèse is to strengthen the understanding of a woman's contribution as central and formative to the whole of the church, and to ask why she was proclaimed Doctor of the Church in 1997.

In order to answer the question as to why Thérèse was declared a doctor of the church it will be helpful to include the requirements for this great ecclesiastical honor. There are three: "great sanctity, eminent learning, and proclamation as a Doctor of the

Church by a pope or ecumenical council.”¹ A person must be canonized a saint before being eligible. When a great teacher arises that moves the church forward whose contributions bring the people closer to the word of God, and the knowledge of God this saint may be proclaimed a doctor of the church by the pope.

There are thirty-three who hold the title. Twenty-nine were priests, one a deacon² and the three women are of course the exceptions to the pattern. Pope Paul VI named St. Teresa of Avila, Doctor of the Church on September 27, 1970. One week later on October 4, 1970, he conferred the title on St. Catherine of Siena. And so it has been only in the last three decades that women have been included in the list, which is the same timeframe as the rise of women’s voices for liberation and equal rights. Certainly, this is more than coincidence. There must be a correlation here between the rising tide of feminist theological strides and the admission of women to the roll of the doctors of the church.

The focus of this project is to recognize Thérèse’s contributions to the church as a profoundly gifted teacher, to amplify her role as a visionary with a mission, and to remember her message, “the little way,” that she may be lifted up as a model and a guide by which other models of reform and renewal may be designed and measured.

One might ask why an American feminist clergywoman living in southern California in the twenty-first century would find such a friend in Thérèse, a Roman Catholic contemplative from nineteenth century France.³ She attracted me with her

¹ B. Forshaw, “Doctor of the Church,” in New Catholic Encyclopedia, vol. 4 (New York: McGraw Hill, 1967).

² Ibid.

³ I was ordained in the United Church of Christ on October 14, 1979 at First Congregational Church in San Bernardino, California.

story, with that beautiful enigmatic smile of hers, with her honesty, her hopefulness, and with her courage to proclaim her gifts even from behind the bars of the convent infirmary. She is a powerfully clear and insightful teacher. Her theology is grounded in the scriptures. And I find her writings highly political and revolutionary for her time and for ours. Her approach to life liberates me from my disappointments with the church and calls me forth to smile it off and keep believing all over again.

There is real help in Thérèse's perspective that this isn't all there is to life. What we do and how we do even the smallest things in life do add up and amount to how we choose to believe and trust God. If I were making a movie of her life I'd try to find an actress who would be a cross between a young Ingrid Bergman and a twenty-four year old Julia Roberts.

Why do thousands venerate her today? What is St. Thérèse's appeal, her attraction, her gift to the church? What are the reasons for all the fascination? Although much has been written about her contribution to the area of spirituality, the area of her work that demands greater study and response is her contribution to church revitalization. The importance of her contribution is demonstrated in at least two substantial ways: first, by the interest in her mission and ministry preserved in her published writings, and secondly, by the honors bestowed upon her by the church.

What makes her different as a woman that may make her contribution to the church a helpful and significant model for leadership? What can her writings, insights and intuitions, provide as models for change? St. Thérèse deserves more than a footnote in the area of spirituality, where her contributions are usually categorized. Her

contributions in the areas of theology and biblical study, church history, and women's studies are at least as significant.

For the church to value and accept the leadership of women is necessary to the health and creativity to the whole body of Christ. The contributions of women must be named, and they must be given due credit for their published works and the influence they have on the life of the church.

Thesis

This project proposes that St. Thérèse's articulation of her mission has become a vision for church reform and renewal, and that a proper appropriation of her contribution can enable the church to benefit from a feminist model of leadership.

There is a mighty woman behind the little sister. And although the church has been more comfortable with knowing her as "the little flower," her teachings are in fact, a woman's way of leadership and reform. She did not separate and divide biblical study, prayer and service, but found ways to braid them together into her daily life.

She sought to bring a unity into her teaching of the novices that was based upon the ongoing progress of her own understanding of theology. She was in relationship with the Creator, the Christ and the Holy Spirit as evidenced in her prayers and writings. Her conversations with Mary, the Blessed Mother, as well as her interactions with the sisters of the Carmelite community with whom she lived show that her living out of her daily life was an integration of prayer, study of scripture, contemplation, and the interaction of her faith in service to this combined community of heaven and earth.

Thérèse was multi-tasking, to use the current jargon. Woman's way of doing theology can be compared to how women do all their other work. Rather than being preoccupied with what department to fit her into, it is helpful to consider her work as inter-disciplinary.

Work Previously Done in the Field

It was customary on the death of a Carmelite nun for a Circulation, or obituary of her life to be circulated, sent around throughout the Order, so that all the other sisters might know of the details of the life of the colleague, to be blessed by her devotion and example as well as learn specific details for prayers. Therefore, Thérèse's own autobiography, The Story of a Soul, was first published in 1898, and was circulated for that purpose. Two thousand copies were printed. Then in the following year an additional four thousand copies were made available. Over a hundred years later, it is still in print and available in as many as one hundred-fifty languages.

Her work spread from the religious orders into the hands of soldiers fighting in the trenches in World War I, on both sides. Catholics and Protestants alike found her writing clear and easy to understand as well as helpful in facing their own problems. She dealt with doubt and difficulty inherent to life. By relying upon God for support in the best and the worst of times, Thérèse struck a note of authenticity and sincerity that needed to be made available to the world in many languages in addition to the French in which she wrote. One reason demand grew was because the methods she presented were straightforward and experiential.

By the 1920s there were a number of works being published about this noteworthy young woman who had lived the last nine years of the less than a quarter of a century granted to her behind the grille of a small convent in rural France. In 1926, Thomas N. Taylor translated and edited a book entitled A Little White Flower.⁴ It is a helpful little volume because of its proximity to her life and also because Taylor had been present at the tribunal of her beatification in Rome, on April 29, 1923. But even his title reflects how men categorized her from the first, in the diminutive.

She was canonized as a saint in 1925. This process usually can not be begun until fifty years after one's death, but in the case of Thérèse of Lisieux the church made an exception. Taylor's 1927 edition, Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, The Little Flower of Jesus⁵ is an expanded work that includes in the Epilogue the process of canonization, as well as Papal documents, letters of St. Thérèse, selected poems, prayers and testaments to her shower of Roses, i.e., her gifts or blessings which helped to establish the validity of her statement, "I will spend my Heaven in doing good upon earth."⁶ Generally, the works cited in this section are arranged chronologically in order to track the history of Thérèse's growing influence and her contribution to the academic community as evidenced by the scholarship applied to her writings.

The rapid rise of her popularity, her universal appeal, and the helpfulness of her methods of bible study and honest heartfelt prayers all contributed to the speedy process of her being named a saint by the church in such a relatively short time frame.

⁴ Thérèse of Lisieux, "A Little White Flower": The Story of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, trans. and ed. Thomas N. Taylor (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1926).

⁵ Thérèse of Lisieux, Saint Thérèse of Lisieux: The Little Flower of Jesus, trans. and ed. Thomas N. Taylor (London: Oates & Washbourne, 1927).

⁶ Thérèse of Lisieux, The Story of a Soul, trans. Michael Day (Rockford, Ill.: Tan Books and Publishers, 1997), 213.

Abbe André Combes, (1899-1969), author of Saint Thérèse and Her Mission, and The Spirituality of Saint Thérèse, just two from his list of books and articles on Thérèse, is a major contributor to the field of Thérésian studies.⁷ His work is ground breaking and foundational. After earning a Th.D. at Toulouse, and a Doctor of Letters from the Sorbonne, he was Professor of Ascetic and Mystical Theology at the Institute Catholic de Paris, and Professor of Research at the Centre National de la Reserche Scientifique.⁸ There he taught a course on the Doctors of the Church. Abbé Combes was convinced that Thérèse was on equal footing with these doctors and included her as such in his teachings, declaring her to be one of the great teachers of the church.⁹ Her teaching will be examined more fully in Chapter 2.

Father John Clarke's translation of Thérèse's autobiography, published in 1975,¹⁰ and his translation of her correspondence, published in 1982,¹¹ continued the process of making her writings available to the reader in English, and included commentaries on former editions of her writings as well as a helpful organization of her general correspondence into two volumes, which will also be addressed in Chapter 2.

Guy Gaucher's The Story of a Life: St. Thérèse of Lisieux, translated by Sister Anne Marie Brennan, comes to life as an honest compilation of her biography, letters,

⁷ André Combs, Saint Thérèse and Her Mission, trans. Alastair Guinan (New York: P. J. Kenedy & Sons, 1955); and The Spirituality of St. Thérèse, trans. Philip E. Hallett (New York: P. J. Kenedy & Sons, 1950).

⁸ Thérèse of Lisieux, General Correspondence, vol. 1, 1877- 1890, trans. John Clarke (Washington, D. C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1982), 3.

⁹ Ibid., forward.

¹⁰ Thérèse of Lisieux, Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, trans. John Clarke (Washington, D. C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1975).

¹¹ Thérèse of Lisieux, General Correspondence, trans. John Clarke, 2 vols. (Washington, D. C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1982 and 1988).

poems, conversations and twenty “testimonies chosen from the tens of thousands.”¹² Thirty-one illustrations, including many photographs taken by Thérèse’s own sister, Céline, (who became Sr. Genevieve when she entered the same convent, the Carmel at Lisieux), contribute so much to make this book noteworthy. Bishop Gaucher is recognized by many as the foremost authority in the study of Thérèse’s life.

Mary Bryden has an article published in the Oxford University Press journal Literature and Theology, “Saints and Stereotypes: The Case of Thérèse of Lisieux”¹³ which is useful in citing where to find papal letters and writings published in English in L’Osservatore Romano, ‘Divini Amoris Scientia,’ (DAS), that are pertinent to this study.

There are over 8,000 entries on the internet and several hundreds of articles in journals in the last few years alone concerning St. Thérèse, yet another indicator of her relevance and popularity, her appeal and usefulness to people’s lives. Part of the work in the preparation of this study has been to be selective in the use of resources.

However, the primary sources are her own published works. Beatification publications and eyewitness accounts of St. Thérèse’s life were also used for this study. The resources were examined in two ways. First, by asking the question, “What was unique about Thérèse’s leadership?” and secondly, “How did her being a woman shape Therese’s thinking, work and her contributions to the contemporary church?”

Scope and Limitations

¹²Guy Gaucher, ed., The Story of a Life: St. Thérèse of Lisieux, trans. Anne Marie Brennan (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1987), 219-25.

¹³ Mary Bryden, “Saints and Stereotypes: The Case of Thérèse of Lisieux,” Literature and Theology 13, no. 1 (March 1999): 1-16.

Due to time constraints and the length limits of the project, the scope will be to summarize Thérèse's theological approach to her life which she called "the little way." This is not a biography or one more spiritual commentary on her writings, but rather an interpretation of her contribution to the church as a woman.

Procedure for Integration

Historical study with emphasis on primary sources, the writings of Thérèse herself and those closest to her, personally and historically, producing a model for revitalization for the contemporary church through woman's leadership is the methodology.

St. Thérèse's The Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, and selections from her poems, prayers, and letters are the cornerstone of this paper. The theological studies of Abbé André Combes, Bishop Guy Gaucher's biography, The Story of a Life, and Father John Clarke's meticulous, faithful translation of her autobiography along with his access to the primary sources, her letters, last conversations, as well as the translation of her autobiography by Michael Day and Father Donald Kinney's complete English translations of her poetry will be used to integrate St. Thérèse's writings. These are viewed from a feminist perspective for a gender analysis of her style and concerns, bringing to bear the way in which the recovery of her voice provides a critique of what historians have left out of her contributions that are powerful and uplifting for the whole community.

The fact that so much attention has been given to her work while at the same time clinging onto the reality of women's work not really being seen as mainstream in leadership causes tension between the actuality of her contribution and the stated mind set that only men can speak as the true leaders and priests in the official church. While continuing to bar women from the priesthood, how can the church in good conscience make such use of this one woman's leadership without also recognizing woman's true place in God's scheme for the hierarchy of the church?

For the contemporary church the priesthood is the platform from which leadership is recognized, and legitimized. To recognize Thérèse's work as so outstanding must also open the minds and the hearts of those in Rome to come to new conclusions that will honor this little one so favored by the Christ. Such interest in her life and her work begs the question; on what grounds can any one be more suited for the priesthood than Thérèse of Lisieux? Can any who would deny her compare to her? This faulty judgment, excluding good women from the priesthood, may in fact become the undoing of the church which seeks to preserve its own principles, i.e., excluding women from ordination and mainstream leadership, above God's.

For truly, God blessed Thérèse above most others for truth and love. She understood her call to the priesthood as part of her responsibility to use all her gifts on behalf of the church. She earnestly desired to celebrate mass and writes, "I feel in me the *vocation of* [her emphasis] the priest!"¹⁴ The time is long overdue for those who have been blessed by her clarity and honesty in the accessible theology and prayers she wrote

¹⁴ Thérèse of Lisieux, Story of a Soul, trans. John Clarke, 3rd ed. (Washington, D. C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1996), 192.

to come to terms with women's ability to lead and to accept the call to the priesthood as a human right not dependent upon gender.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter 1 introduces St. Thérèse as the subject of the project, and poses the question, what was unique about her leadership? A woman's contribution to the church will be examined using a historical methodology as seen through the perspective of feminist theology.

The selected works of St. Thérèse The Story of a Soul, The Autobiography of St. Thérèse as well as selections from her correspondence, prayers and poems will form the foundation of the research. These will be used to establish the major points of her vision, her ministry and mission, finding the real Thérèse in her own voice, which speaks clearly, concisely, and recognizably down through the decades preserved in her own words. Through her teachings and writings, and conversations Chapter 2 raises the question, how her being a woman shaped her contribution to the contemporary church.

"St. Thérèse's Influence on the Church" is the title for Chapter 3. This chapter will show how her work, much of which is well seasoned with her own Bible study, was received in the twentieth century, and the growing influence her writings have had upon the church. It will also seek to understand how one woman who was out of the realm of

influence to the priesthood did in fact significantly impact the church. In light of her perspective, the balance of humility and power will be explored.

In Chapter 4, “The Relevance of Gender” is addressed. Because Thérèse was a Carmelite nun, living the contemplative life without career aspirations dependent upon the bishop, cardinal, pope hierarchy, she was free to answer the call of a prophetic visionary. Because she was a woman, her work during her lifetime was outside the jurisdiction of the male power structure and therefore uncensored. Because she spent all of her adult life within the community of women, she developed a model of trust and an educational process of support that was conversational and relational rather than independent. She was interested in the application of goodness rather than a definition of or theory about sainthood.

Writing just over a hundred years ago, her way of doing theology is very much in step with feminist thinking of today and needs to be examined in light of recent work done in the field by Carol Gilligan and Carol Lakey Hess. What does it look like when women do theology, teach and lead? In Thérèse’s own words, “to be a mother of souls, a warrior, a priest, an apostle, a doctor of the Church,”¹⁵ were her hopes, her desires, her calling. Her vocation was Love. Certainly, gender is germane to this discussion in looking at some of the issues facing the contemporary church.

“Implications of Feminist Caring” is the topic for Chapter 5. Since the church has accorded her the honors of Sainthood and Doctor of the Church, it behooves scholars of the twenty-first century to define her role and her gifts to the church. A discussion of feminism as it relates to church power, i.e. valuing, recognizing, crediting and welcoming

¹⁵ Thérèse of Lisieux, Story of a Soul, trans. Day, 197.

women's work will be addressed. The blessings of her experiences, as seen through the lens of a feminist hermeneutic, are not revisionist, but rather they are helpful in understanding her genius and her gifts to the church for today, and will be the material covered in Chapter 5.

The final chapter, "St. Thérèse's Last Will and Testament: Summary and Conclusions" will demonstrate that her writings, rooted in the Gospel, deeply affected the church. Therefore, her study of the Bible and her ability to select significant passages on her own, without the benefit of seminary education, combined with her faithful application of her understanding of scripture as central to the faith has much to offer in the way of understanding not only her contribution, but also in its usefulness as a model for others to follow. St. Thérèse's contributions have produced far reaching influence in the areas of reform, renewal and revitalization.

Summary

My research that preceded this paper could not answer the persistent questions that arose in relation to St. Thérèse's impact on the church that is well beyond the sphere of spirituality. This dissertation seeks to trace her method and influence and to examine the woman behind the little sister who has contributed so much to the revitalization and renewal of the church. Truly St. Thérèse has realized her ambition to be a mother of souls. There is a mighty woman behind the little sister.

CHAPTER 2

SELECTED WORKS OF ST. THÉRÈSE

In Her Own Hand

Fortunately, both Thérèse and her sister, Pauline, the Reverend Mother Agnès, understood the importance of keeping Thérèse's writing free from the editors pen of the men of the church. It is because of the understanding and insight of both that her clear voice has been preserved.

The kind of bias that men have often brought to woman's work is to either try to rewrite it into what they consider a systematic theology or to trivialize woman's voice as cute or sentimental or irrelevant. Because many thousands of men and women had become familiar with her story and her development of a theology of humility, which she referred to as the "little way," it was not possible for reconstruction or revision of her work, or credit for her originality, to be accomplished.

There is at least one example of a theological correction by a priest to Thérèse's sixth prayer, "Act of Oblation to Merciful Love." She writes that Jesus instructs us,

'Whatever you ask the Father in my name he will give it to you!' I am certain, then, that you will grant my desires; I know, O my God! That the more you want to give, the more you make us desire. I feel in my heart immense desires.¹

¹ Thérèse of Lisieux, *The Prayers of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux: The Act of Oblation*, trans. Aletheia Kane (Washington, D. C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies Publications, 1997), 53-54.

Originally, Thérèse wrote “infinite desires” because of how she comprehended God’s fathomless Love.² She was obedient, but she and Mother Agnes never let this happen again. Only she was permitted to edit Thérèse’s work.

Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face wrote the first section of her autobiography, The Story of a Soul, because her sister Pauline, Mother Agnès, the prioress of the Lisieux Carmel, asked her to write the memories of her childhood. The nature of this request was given in the form of a formal order. Therefore Thérèse was under obedience to comply. These comprise the first eight chapters of her book and are also identified as Manuscript A. Here she records the details of her life from early childhood up to the January of 1896, when she was still hopeful that she would be well enough to go to the mission at Saigon, founded by Lisieux, which was seeking personnel for a new house at Hanoi.

By this time her sister Céline had entered the convent and was now known as Sr. Genevieve. Thérèse is the assistant Novice Mistress and although she is three years younger than Sr. Genevieve she already has six years seniority on her as a nun. Thérèse calls this time in her life her “springtime story.”

It is at this juncture that translations vary. Manuscripts B and C are not always published in the same order. Each was hand-written in an exercise book. Manuscript B is a letter to Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart, “who are doubly my Sister,” written in September, 1886, when she had just a year to live, to address the need for including the “secrets Jesus has shared with her.” This section, or manuscript is only one chapter,

² Ibid., 69. “With Mother Agnes, Thérèse will take mischievous revenge on the ‘theologian’ who in June 1895 asked for the correction.” She has used “infinite desires” in letters before and after this prayer, even quoting Jesus, “I made their desires infinite.”

sometimes it is chapter nine, as in Clarke's translation, while in Day's edition, it is chapter eleven. It is here that she writes "my *vocation*, at last I have found it...MY VOCATION IS LOVE."³ Marie had been her godmother when Thérèse began her first religious studies for her confirmation.

Manuscript C was a longer letter, two chapters, written to Mother Marie de Gonzague, her current Prioress. Sr. Agnès, at Sr. Marie's suggestion, went to Mother Marie to suggest that although Thérèse had written the two manuscripts, she had not written anything specifically about her doctrine and her teachings. Mother Marie then ordered Thérèse to do just that. This was the process by which she completed her brief autobiography, all within the last two and a half years of her life, when she was becoming progressively more critically ill with tuberculosis.

In addition to her autobiography, Thérèse wrote fifty-four poems and a body of correspondence, consisting of two hundred forty some letters written between 1877 and 1897, which have also survived, as well as 21 independent prayers and three plays. These primary resources will be used to look at the details of her life in order to find her own voice.

One need not read the experts to discover Thérèse's voice. She speaks well for herself, indeed, better than all her commentators. But it is helpful to read her autobiography several times to begin to grasp the enormity of her simple contribution. Perhaps the question to ask is what comes forth from her own words that are so refreshing and revitalizing. Through her prayer conversations with the Trinity and her contemplation she discovers the crucial importance of not dividing justice and mercy but

³ Thérèse of Lisieux, Story of a Soul, 3rd ed., trans. Clarke, (1996), 194.

in holding these aspects within a living unity and applying this to every aspect of her life, every beat of her heart.

Contemplating the distance that God's justice and punishment put between souls and God we find her thought processes and the humor and depth of her theology. She is not "attracted" to the punishments. Turning to her voice again Thérèse writes:

O my God! Will your Justice alone find souls willing to immolate themselves as victims? Does not Your *Merciful Love* [Thérèse's punctuation and emphasis] need them too? On every side this love is unknown, rejected; those hearts upon whom You would lavish it turn to creatures, seeking happiness from them with their miserable affection; they do this instead of throwing themselves into Your arms and accepting Your infinite *Love*. O my God! Is Your disdained Love going to remain closed within Your Heart? It seems to me that if You were to find souls offering themselves as victims of holocaust to Your Love, You would consume them rapidly; it seems to me, too, that You would be happy not to hold back the waves of infinite tenderness within You. If Your Justice loves to release itself...how more does Your Merciful Love desire to *set souls on fire* since Your Mercy *reaches to the heavens*. O, my Jesus, let me be this happy victim; consume Your holocaust with the fire of Your Divine Love.⁴

Thérèse both grasps and expresses the attraction of God's Love which is not separated from God's Justice but an integral and equal aspect of God, which she finds missing in the leadership's teachings for the church. She is attracted to the comforting embrace of a dear heavenly One and invites other souls into the cosmic tender touch, which she employs as her way of life.

What was the interplay between her life in the convent, one of prayer and contemplation, and the struggle with health issues and life in the community as she deepened her conversations with Jesus, her child, spouse, and her savior? The deep, dark doubts she expressed were existential, yet she never doubted the need to continue in faith in the face of the doubts that haunted her. She was scrupulously honest with herself in

⁴ Ibid., 180-81.

her conversations and prayers and sought the truth in every aspect of her living and writing. She sought direction for her living in scripture and prayer.

Biography

To answer the question of who was Sister Thérèse, some biographical information will be needed to set the stage. It will be helpful to learn something about the circumstances of her life and her world before she became a writer. Her birth name was Marie Françoise Thérèse Martin. She was born on January 2, 1873, to Louis Martin and Zélie Guerin at Alençon, France, in Normandy, some fifty miles from the beaches of World War II fame. Thérèse was the last of nine children, five girls and four boys. Five of the children died in infancy or soon after, and the four daughters who reached maturity all entered religious orders.

The family was described as a devout Catholic family that attended daily mass together, “set aside a considerable portion of their income for the work of the Propagation of the Faith,”⁵ and were charitable to people in need. Papa Martin was successful enough as a jeweler to sell his business at the age of forty-eight and began to help his wife in her flourishing business. Mama was very successful as a business woman in the famous lace-making art of that region.

Zélie Martin was a manufacturer of the exquisite Alençon lace. She designed the patterns, oversaw the workers and did the complex work of invisibly joining the

⁵ Thérèse of Lisieux, Little Flower of Jesus, trans. Taylor, 19.

pieces of lace together herself.⁶ She also marketed the finished products to the Paris fashion elite. If this kind of lace were available today it would sell for hundreds of dollars and be sold by the inch. They were considered a comfortable middle class family, members of the bourgeoisie.

Perhaps the one thing that sets them apart from many was the fact that both parents had had a strong desire to enter religious life. Louis was sent back home by the monks of The Great Saint Bernard Hospice in the Swiss Alps in order to learn Latin before entering the priesthood.⁷ Although he remained devout and committed to the church, the study of Latin was his Waterloo.

Zélie “had been firmly discouraged” from joining the Sisters of Charity by the superior of the Hotel-Dieu,⁸ who believed that God had other plans for her out in the world.⁹

And so, because of their union, the “greatest saint of modern times”¹⁰ was born into this loving, happy, Christian home where she was wanted and doted upon. But within less than five years Thérèse’s world would be turned upside down by her mother’s death which was due to breast cancer.

Each of us is the product of the interplay of a combination of influences and factors; our parents and siblings and other important family members, the time and place of our birth, as well as our own talents, limitations, and reactions to the circumstances of

⁶ Jean Chalon, Thérèse of Lisieux: A Life of Love, trans. Anne Collier Rehill (Liguori, Mo.: Liguori Publications, 1997), 3.

⁷ Conrad De Meester, ed., Saint Thérèse of Lisieux: Her Life, Times, and Teaching. (Washington, D. C.: ICS Publications, 1997), 10.

⁸ St. Thérèse of Lisieux, Story of a Soul, trans. Day, xiii, 9.

⁹ Thérèse of Lisieux, Little Flower of Jesus, trans. Taylor, 17.

¹⁰ Combes, Saint Thérèse and Her Mission, 3, quoting Pope Pius X.

life, to name just a few. Such is the case of Thérèse Martin. At last it was a time of peace and prosperity in France.

Just two years before Thérèse was born, Prussian soldiers had occupied the bottom floor of the Martin home as a result of the Franco-Prussian War. The upheaval of the French revolution was still a fresh memory through out the country. The days of the Napoleonic Empire and its aftermath had taxed the infrastructures, the resources, and the lives of the citizens to the fullest and was very recent history in the world into which Thérèse was born.

It was the Victorian age. The first wave of modern feminism had begun.¹¹ Alexander Graham Bell had invented the telephone. Train travel had made cities much more easily accessed. This was the age of invention. It was also the beginning of the tourist industry for religious pilgrimage.

Drawing from her own autobiography and writing under obedience in The Story of a Soul, Thérèse describes her life prior to entering the cloister as “divided into three definite periods.” The first was from the time of her birth until her mother’s death, when she was four years and eight months;¹² the second, she called childhood sufferings and growing up, when her sister Pauline, her second mother, left to join the convent at Carmel of Lisieux in 1882 to become Sister Agnès of Jesus.

In 1886, within a week of each other, both Leonie and Marie left home to enter convents, Poor Clares at Alençon and Lisieux Carmel, respectively. It was during this period that Thérèse had crying spells and relentless headaches that were severe, and

¹¹ The first Women’s Rights Convention was held in Seneca Falls, New York in 1848.

¹² St. Thérèse of Lisieux, Story of a Soul, trans. Day, 5.

something referred to as “tremblings.” There were hallucinations, and a serious unnamed illness from which she almost died, of which she wrote, “I seemed to be delirious nearly all the time.”¹³ “I... turned to my Heavenly Mother, asking her with all my heart to take pity on me now.”¹⁴ Thérèse describes that their statue of the Queen of Heaven came to life, and she was instantly cured with “happiness.”¹⁵

Then “on Christmas Day, 1886; The Divine Child, scarcely an hour old, flooded the darkness of my soul with radiant light.”¹⁶ Thérèse recovers her joy that she lost when her mother died and she is no longer plagued with crying and the hyper-sensitivity. She is granted a “complete conversion” by God’s miracle of grace,¹⁷ and thus begins the third phase of her life before entering Carmel.

Thérèse’s early experiences with the curative powers of joy and happiness had instructed her early on that this approach was what the Church was missing. Eventually, she would find her “little way of childhood” joy and happiness would contribute the perspective to the revitalization of the contemporary church.

The Pilgrimage to Rome

When Thérèse was fifteen and Céline was eighteen, their father took them on a trip to Italy to “celebrate Pope Leo XIII’s sacerdotal jubilee.”¹⁸ There were almost two

¹³ Ibid., 41.

¹⁴ Ibid., 43.

¹⁵ Ibid., 44.

¹⁶ Ibid., 64.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Gaucher, Story of a Life, 73.

hundred travelers, many were members of the nobility, and seventy-five were members of the clergy.¹⁹ It was here that she came to a realization, priests are human.

Perhaps this valuable insight helped her to breach convention on Sunday, November 20, 1887, when she at last had an audience with the pope and spoke to him about her burning desire to enter the convent at Lisieux at such an early age. Just as with the Queen of England today, one does not address royalty unless spoken to first, but then there were many exceptions to convention in the course of her life and this was just one of them. All were strictly forbidden to address the pope. The courage of her mission, her vocation to save souls was not the dream of a child but the calling of her soul, and she had decided, like the martyrs to the coliseum she had just visited, she was compelled to speak.

Almost in biblical fashion, three times she spoke. “Most Holy Father, I have a great favor to ask of you!”...“Holy Father, in honor of your Jubilee, permit me to enter Carmel at the age of fifteen!”²⁰ The pope didn’t understand what she was requesting. The Vicar General had to explain that she was too young and that “the Superiors are considering the matter at the moment.”²¹ The pontiff told her to “do what the Superiors tell you!”²²

Resting my hands on his knees, I made a final effort, saying in a suppliant voice: “Oh! Holy Father, if you say yes, everybody will agree!” He gazed at me steadily, speaking these words and stressing each syllable: “Go...go...*You will enter if God wills it!*”[Thérèse’s emphasis]²³

¹⁹ St Thérèse of Lisieux, Story of a Soul, trans. Clarke (1975), 121.

²⁰ Ibid., 134-35.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

She then goes on to describe how she would have spoken again but that two guards gently brought her up from the kneeling position and carried her from the room where another guard gave her a medal of the pope.²⁴ I include this exchange because she was not acting like a rebellious teenager but as one who had done everything she could to do what God was asking her to do.²⁵

On to Carmel

It took from the end of December until after Lent in the spring of 1888 for all the necessary details to be completed for one so young to begin the process of becoming a nun. Permission came from the bishop at the New Year, but the prioress felt that one so young would need to wait until after Lent because the fast the nuns observed at that time was too severe for the health of a growing girl. On April 9 Thérèse Martin leaves the world to enter Carmel as Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, which was the name she chose as a Carmelite nun. This process is accomplished in three stages; the postulate, the novitiate and the profession.

For Thérèse, the postulancy began in April when she entered the community. Her day was divided into specific times for “prayer in choir,” six hours, “meals at ten and six o’clock (never any meat, except in a case of sickness),”²⁶ two hours of community recreation, one after each meal, five hours for the necessary tasks, such as laundry, cooking, cleaning, making hosts, painting, and sewing. There were seven hours for

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 136.

²⁶ Gaucher, Story of a Life, 91.

sleeping in the winter. The only room with a fireplace was the recreation room, and “all members of the well-regulated group spent their lives in silence and solitude.”²⁷

Living in community is never automatic, even for the future saint. She was living in the convent, one of twenty-six women,²⁸ each with her own personality, needs, jealousies, misunderstandings, and temperaments. There was an age spread of fifteen to the eighty some years. Forty-seven was the average age.²⁹ There were aristocratic and peasant women, those who were healthy as well as some who were unwell. One poor sister even had to leave the convent for the mental hospital.³⁰ Although finally reunited with her own two older sisters, Thérèse had to refrain from any special attention to them or from them. Thérèse was often plagued by coughing spells and the discomfort of the cold and dampness.

She describes this way of life as full of joys and sorrows, not without difficulties, yet one for which she is well suited. Her postulancy ended in January of the following year with a five day retreat for the *Reception of the Habit*, when the street clothing is exchanged for the habit and one becomes a novitiate.

The ceremony is a highlight in the life of a nun. In her era, the bridal wardrobe was often as elaborate as the woman’s family could afford and her final fling of fashion. Thérèse must have been very beautiful in her long white velvet dress with its train,³¹ trimmed in swan’s down. Her father had provided a gift of valuable Alençon lace, the

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 88.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 93. See also Genevieve Devergnies, “Thérèse and Her Carmelite Community,” in St. Thérèse, ed. De Meester.

³¹ Ibid., 99.

work of her own mother, saved for this day; along with a 10,000F dowry to the convent.³²

She was tall, beautiful with long golden curls, the color of butterscotch taffy, down her back and decorated with lilies which were a gift from her aunt. On the arm of her distinguished looking father she must have created something to behold.

This is a period of probationary membership usually for a period of six months, but in her case the profession, (when final vows are taken and the veil is received) was delayed until September 24, 1890.³³ But it was during this time that she begins to formulate her understanding of scriptures. This will be more fully developed in Chapter 3.

What's in a Name?

Through her reading of Isaiah 53, Thérèse finds power and identity especially in the servant aspect. Handle's *Messiah* can almost be heard here. "He was despised. Rejected. A man of sorrow and acquainted with grief."

She claims the Child Jesus and the mature Jesus, the Holy Face, which she has recognized in the poetry of Isaiah, as the parenthetical titles of her life as a nun. She establishes these as the margins within which she will write the theology of her life, The Story of a Soul, which is the framework of this paper.

Her name also symbolizes the two arch holidays of Christianity, Christmas and Easter. These two symbols that she took for her name, the Child Jesus and the Holy Face were an ever-present reminder of the incarnation, and Christ's participation in life here on

³² Ibid., 97.

³³ Thérèse of Lisieux, Story of a Soul, trans. Clarke (1975), 282-83.

earth. He chooses us, and she chose him. She expressed the reciprocity of God's love even in her name. Her name, then becomes a powerful symbol of her theology, and a teaching tool.

Her sister Mother Agnès said that the emphasis should actually be on her devotion to the Holy Face.³⁴ Thérèse said these were her royal titles. Just four months before she died she was photographed in the garden of the cloister holding a picture of both, one in each hand. It's a very poignant picture, pointing out who she is, Thérèse, both of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face. She worked at being "as a child" and being centered in the devotion to Christ in Gethsemane, staying awake to the call of the Gospel. Bishop Gaucher writes,

When we mutilate her name, we mutilate her message, and indeed her whole life. If we rely on the testimony of Mother Agnès, given at the Beatification Process, we could justly call her Sister Thérèse of the Holy Face.³⁵

Vision, Ministry and Mission

Thérèse's vision, ministry, and mission are interwoven and cannot be separated. Her vision was that God wills that no souls should perish and her ministry and mission were to bring this good news to her generation and ones to follow. If not to the mission field of Indo-China, then the whole world would be her mission until time was no more. Her ministry was to save souls. She believed that we could never win or earn this

³⁴ Guy Gaucher, *The Passion of Thérèse of Lisieux*, trans. Anne Marie Brennan (New York: Crossroad Publishing., 1989), 226.

³⁵ Ibid.

(salvation) but that God loved all children and that by becoming again as trusting as little children, God's grace was sufficient.

This was her "little way of childhood" which was based in part on a daily and continuing, placing all of one's trust into God's hands with all confidence and love.

But you know my weakness, Lord. Every morning I make a resolution to practice humility and in the evening I recognize that I have committed again many faults of pride. At this I am tempted to become discouraged but I know discouragement is also pride. Therefore, O my God, I want to base my hope in *You alone*. [Thérèse's emphasis] Since you can do everything, deign to bring to birth in my soul the virtue I desire. To obtain this grace of your infinite mercy I will very often repeat: "O Jesus, gentle and humble of heart, make my heart like yours!"³⁶

She had absolute certainty that her work would not stop with her death, but that she would be just beginning the application of her doctrine of the little way of childhood from heaven. She saw herself with absolute confidence as becoming a missionary to the new world, writing, "My way is all confidence and love"³⁷ and "I would like to preach the Gospel on all five continents...until the consummation of the ages."³⁸

I find in her words an unusual balance of submission and leadership. She accepted the authority of the order and saw it as an expression of God's will. And yet she would not give up on her understanding of God's call on her life. Thérèse cleared many hurdles put in her way by what she called other powers.

I can laugh out loud at her wit, delighting in her sense of humor, her understanding of play, as relating to her own difficulty at staying awake during those long hours of community prayers.

³⁶ Thérèse of Lisieux, *Prayers of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux*, trans. Kane, 116.

³⁷ Thérèse of Lisieux, *General Correspondence*, vol. 2, 1093, in a letter to P. Roulland, missionary, written May 9, 1897.

³⁸ Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, trans. Clarke (1975), 193.

I should be desolate for having slept (for seven years) during prayer time and thanksgiving: well, I am not desolate. I remember that little children are just as pleasing to their parents when they are asleep as when they are awake.³⁹

Abbé Combes described her spiritual achievement as “sublime exploration” which put “Thérèse in the very heart of the adorable Trinity...the Holy Spirit ...conducting her, under the wings of that divine Eagle, the Word, to the everlasting home of Love.”⁴⁰ Combes was elaborating on her mission, the Holocaust of Love, and declared Thérèse to be “one of the most epoch-making developments that the Holy Ghost has inspired during the whole of man’s spiritual history.”⁴¹

One aspect of her mission was to be a saint. She would accomplish this not through greatness but through simple surrender of all pride, and by the reciprocal love she shared with the Trinity.

She read the scriptures, both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, meditated on what she read, asked for guidance in prayer believing the promises, and tried to live out these ideas in her daily life in community. She began to develop and teach this little way of love, with the simplicity of children, the sacred innocence of a child which was not always easy. Rather it was simplified.

Theology and Doctrine

In this section of her autobiography she explains:

³⁹ Gaucher, *Story of a Life*, 152.

⁴⁰ André Combes, *Saint Thérèse and Her Mission: The Basic Principles of Thérésian Spirituality*, trans. Alastair Guinan (New York: P. J. Kenedy & Sons, 1955), 16.

⁴¹ André Combes, *The Spirituality of St. Thérèse: An Introduction*, trans. Philip E. Hallett (New York: P. J. Kenedy & Sons, 1950), 52.

You know that I have always wanted to be a saint; but compared with real Saints, I know perfectly well that I am no more like them than a grain of sand trodden beneath the feet of passers-by is like a mountain with its summit in the clouds.

Instead of allowing this to discourage me, I say to myself: "God would never inspire me with desires which cannot be realized; so, in spite of my littleness, I can hope to be to be a Saint. I could never grow up. I must put up with myself as I am, full of imperfections, but I will find a little way to Heaven, very short and direct, an entirely new way.

"We live in the age of invention now, and the wealthy no longer have to take the trouble to climb the stairs; they take an elevator. That is what I must find, *an elevator* to take me straight up to Jesus, because I am too little to climb the steep stairway of perfection."

So, I searched the Scriptures for some hint of my desired *elevator*, until I came upon these words from the lips of Eternal Wisdom: "*Whosoever is a little one,... come to Me.*" (Prov. 9:4)...I continued my search. This is what I found: "*You shall be carried at the breast and upon the knees; as one whom the mother caresseth, so will I comfort you.*" (Is. 66:12, 13). My heart had never been moved by such tender words before! *Your arms, My Jesus, are the elevator* which will take me up to heaven. There is no need for me to grow up; on the contrary, I must stay little, and become more and more so.⁴² [all italics are Thérèse's]

This lengthy quote shows how she does Bible study. She searches with a purpose, expecting the Holy Spirit to teach her. It demonstrates the process or development of her doctrine. It indicates her humor and wit and inventiveness. It also indicates that she was well aware of and at home with the feminine aspects of God: God as Wisdom, (SHE) and God as Mother, the comforter.

A brief description of Thérèse's writing mechanics will help explain her individualized style in the rather unconventional use of quotation marks, underlining, capitalization, exclamation marks, dashes and the parade of running period marks. She was often emphatic in what she was writing. She showed her excitement, passion and the

⁴² Thérèse of Lisieux, Story of a Soul, trans. Day, 140-41.

importance of what she was trying to convey calling special attention to what she was writing. I will try to honor her style to keep the tone she used.

In addition to her autobiography, there are two hundred sixty-six letters and fifty-four completed poems. These primary sources will be addressed with two questions in mind. What is Thérèse's contribution to the contemporary church towards revitalization? How does her gender affect her leadership? The answers will be found in the combinations of her writings. I will be concentrating on the work she did in the last two years of her life when she already knew time was growing short and that her contributions were important.

She was inventive, partly because she was in relationship with God, through her devotion and dedication to Jesus, and because she understood human natures so well, her own and other people's. Perhaps due to her difficulty in breathing, exacerbated by the advancing tuberculosis and the climbing of stairs to her room several times a day she came up with a charming, humorous illustration that we need an elevator up to God, a lift, to ease the climb.⁴³ For Thérèse that lift is Jesus the Child and Jesus of the Holy Face.

Into a world where philosophers were questioning the existence of God, and into the church which had long been subjected to the one-sided paternal bias of Western religious thought, in "frolics"⁴⁴ Thérèse. As described in her poem entitled "For Sister Marie of the Trinity," who was an especially beloved novice under her care, "Like a little

⁴³ Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, trans. Clarke (1975), 207.

⁴⁴ Thérèse of Lisieux, *The Poetry of St. Thérèse of Lisieux*, trans. Donald Kinney (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1996), 210.

lamb...I merrily frolicked.” But she is confident that the desires that God has instilled in her are there for her to realize and will indeed become a blessing to the church.

From her own writings, the church is able to find the voice of a strong woman who combines a unique set of gifts: maturity, discernment, courage, charm, creativity, wit, humor, mischievousness, and simplicity. This is not the picture of an insignificant little flower but one of a mature woman of enormous faith, who possessed a great talent for teaching, writing, and theologizing. She was tenacious. This is only a partial list of her gifts to the church, which helps to answer why it is enamored with Thérèse, and so indebted to her qualities of leadership.

From the time Thérèse was a little girl she venerated her countrywoman, Joan of Arc. She identified with the warrior image of one who would fight for God and fight for France. She writes, “I have been like a sentry watching for the enemy from the highest turret of a castle.”⁴⁵ Her weapon of choice which she used to fight the enemy, the devil, was humility. Her purpose was Peace, but she was ready to fight and to die for the Church.

I feel the need and the desire of carrying out the most heroic deeds for you, *O Jesus*. I feel within my soul the courage of the *Crusader*, the *Papal Guard*, and I would want to die on the field of battle in defense of the Church.⁴⁶

To summarize Chapter 2, I have sought to show how Thérèse saw herself as a very strong woman rather than the shrinking violet so often put forth by those who have written about her. Like a soldier living by the book, St. Thérèse learned the discipline of a religious. Nuns took vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. She was under orders to

⁴⁵ Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, trans. Day, 168.

⁴⁶ Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, trans. Clarke (1975), 192.

write her autobiography. And she followed the orders of her superiors like the soldier she was. She expresses this same symbolism in the last verse of the poem “My Weapons,”

If I have the powerful armor of the Warrior
 If I imitate him and fight bravely...
 I also want to sing as I fight...
 Then I can sing of the strength and sweetness
 Of your Mercies.
 Smiling, bravely I face the fire...
 I shall die on the battlefield,
 My weapons in hand!⁴⁷

This poem was written on March 25, 1897. Thérèse was actually dying. She had a fever every afternoon; she could not keep food down.⁴⁸ Treatments for her disease at the time consisted of rubbing her down with coarse hair gloves, vesicatories, a torture that consisted of applying hot plasters to the skin to bring up blisters,⁴⁹ and finally a treatment procedure that may have been the most excruciating, something called “*pointes de feu*” (a cauterizing remedy for tuberculosis, consisting of the repeated puncturing of the skin with red-hot needles.)⁵⁰

Weak from persistent coughing up of blood, called hemoptysis, her suffering was intensified by the practice of not administering narcotics to nuns for pain management. Her physical suffering, which is difficult to even read about, was compounded by the very real pain associated with the stigma associated with the disease itself.

Up until the mid-twentieth century tuberculosis was considered by most to be connected with moral degeneracy not unlike AIDS in the 1980s. Because there was no cure the assumption was somebody must have done something terrible to be visited with

⁴⁷ Thérèse of Lisieux, *Poetry*, 196.

⁴⁸ Thérèse of Lisieux, *General Correspondence*, 2: 1076.

⁴⁹ Thérèse of Lisieux, *Her Last Conversations*, trans. John Clarke (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1977), 35.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 40 and 52.

CHAPTER 3

ST. THÉRÈSE'S INFLUENCE on the CHURCH

Thérèse, the Mustard Seed of Faith

How can one woman who lived cloistered from the world and for only twenty-four years, at that, have made such an impact on the life of the church? Here is an impressive list of her posthumous awards: 1923, Beatification, 1925, Canonization, in 1927, Thérèse was proclaimed Principal Patroness of all universal missions, for all missionaries, both women and men, an honor equal to St. Francis Xavier, 1929, patron of the Catholic Worker Movement, patron of Mexico, 1937, the Basilica is opened, 1941, the Foundation of the French Mission is established with a new seminary established in Lisieux in Thérèse's name as patron, in May of 1944, St. Thérèse is named Secondary Patroness of France, equal to Joan of Arc. In 1954 the new Basilica of St. Thérèse at Lisieux is consecrated. Construction which was begun 1929 and suffered under the bombings of World War II is today a magnificent architectural splendor¹ with mosaics and stained glass combining old and new world artistry exquisitely.

On the centenary of her death a world tour of her reliquary was planned for 1996-1997 and the throngs that gathered to honor St. Thérèse surprised even those who had planned the celebrations.²

¹ Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, 3rd ed., trans. Clarke (1996), 287-88.

² Frank Frost, pro. and dir., *Thérèse: Living on Love* (The Elijah Project, 2000), videocassette.

A partial list of her influence is also shown by the “1,700 churches or chapels,” eight cathedrals, and perhaps one of the most surprising is the basilica at Cairo, Egypt given by that city’s Muslims for the “little saint of Allah” in gratitude for their thankfulness to Thérèse “for all the favors received.”³

The process of her beatification and the canonization that eventually lead to her eligibility to become one of the doctors of the church is an interesting saga to explain. As the impact of her popularity continued to increase, Thomas N. Taylor, a young priest from Scotland on a pilgrimage to Lisieux, suggested to Thérèse’s sisters that they should initiate the work that would lead to “opening the process in 1903.”⁴

By 1906 the “Cause of Sister Thérèse” leading to beatification was introduced at Rome.⁵ Father Rodrique, in Rome and Monsignor de Teil of Paris, “are named Postulator and Vice-Postulator of the Cause respectively.” Within the year, the Carmel at Lisieux had “received 9,741 letters” from all over the world and the “Tribunal for the Ordinary’s Process” was begun.⁶ 1914, Carmel receives an average of 200 letters a day...At Rome, the decree of approbation of the Writings of Sister Thérèse leads to Pope Pius X’s signature on the Decree for the Introduction of the Cause.⁷

On St. Patrick’s Day, March 17, 1915, at Bayeux, France the Apostolic Process was opened. “The three popes under whom the process took place were deeply convinced of Thérèse’s holiness and the importance of the ‘little way’ she wanted to

³ Pierre Descouvemont and Raymond Zambelli, “Thérèse’s Universal Influence,” in St. Thérèse, ed. DeMeester, 264.

⁴ Ibid., 258-63.

⁵ Thérèse of Lisieux, Story of a Soul, 3rd ed., trans. Clarke (1996), 286.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 287.

bring to the world.”⁸ The separate process to determine Therese’s reputation for holiness was waived because of the overwhelming evidence, and further proof was unnecessary.

Two cures regarded as miracles are required for beatification, that is to be considered as holy, and two additional miracles are required for sainthood. In the case of Thérèse the examples were so numerous that the difficulty was in making the choice as to which to investigate.⁹ Also required is the proof that the candidate was a real living human being and therefore her body was exhumed for the second time and doctors testified that the bones were Thérèse’s. Her writings as well as the thirty-seven witnesses who gave their dispositions, had to be able to withstand the scrutiny of the process which is equivalent to a court trial, and be found to be true and without contradiction. Hundreds of pages of testimony were recorded. She was venerated on August 14, 1921 by Pope Benedict XV, the first degree of three necessary for sainthood, i.e., veneration, beatification, and canonization.

Pope Pius XI “signed the decree declaring the authenticity of the two miracles investigated” for Thérèse’s beatification calling her both “a miracle of virtue” and a “prodigy of miracles.” At last the day of her beatification is at hand, April 29, 1923, and Pope Pius XI calls this the “most beautiful day of my pontificate.”¹⁰

Two years later, on May 17, 1925, in Rome, finally Thérèse Martin, Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face is canonized, St. Thérèse. This pope always kept her picture and her relics on his desk and “never ceased to entrust to Thérèse his major...initiatives...and the development of missions.”¹¹

⁸ Descouvemont and Zambelli, in DeMeester, 261.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 263.

¹¹ Ibid.

Perhaps the time was just right for one who was struggling so honestly with her faith and who left her blueprint for a practical theology that consisted of prayer, Bible study, and the application of biblical wisdom to her own life situation. As her own experience in relationship to the Trinity grew and deepened so did her commitment to Love, including loving those of her community with whom she found it the most difficult to cope.

In the preface to The Doctor of the Little Way Bishop Guy Gaucher writes:

We can safely say that she was one of the heralds who paved the way for the Second Vatican Council. In the Catechism of the Catholic Church, she is quoted six times in very strategic places. In the history of humanity and the Church nothing has ever been accomplished without the contribution of both men and women...No one ever went to greater lengths to bring to life the truths of the Incarnation than the holy women we find with Mary....Thérèse (was) declared a Doctor of the Church....¹²

Then in his own book he continues:

The Second Vatican Council (1962-5), without naming Thérèse, owes much to her prophetic intuitions: the return to the word of God, the priority given to the theological virtues (faith, hope and charity) in everyday life, the Church seen as the body of Christ, the universal mission, the call of each baptized person to sanctity... (Thérèse's) idea of heaven as a dynamic place...her desire for daily communion, her Marian theology and so on¹³

St. Thérèse is leading the tides of change that call women forth into their rightful places of innovative leadership in caring for all souls.

An important aspect of her appeal was due to the media advances of the time.

Photographs of Thérèse made her seem so present, so accessible. Marchese Guglielmo Marconi was born in 1874, just one year after Thérèse. The Vatican's first world wide

¹² Franciscan Friars, St. Thérèse: The Doctor of the Little Way, introd. Guy Gaucher, ed. Francis Mary (Waite Park, Minn.: Park Press, 1997), x.

¹³ Gaucher, Story of a Life, 215.

broadcast was at Thérèse's beatification. Her autobiography was written in simple everyday language that did not require theological study to understand and she spoke to the people's hunger for a need to reach out for God. This is how someone so small in the realm of God grew into such a mighty shrub (Mark 4: 30-32). Here is her three point plan: simple, honest prayer, searching scripture for answers, and doing kindness and love where you are.

The Power of Prayer

Thérèse's ideas on prayer are honest, sometimes humorous, and often instructive. They contribute to the help she provides to her disciples as a teacher. She admits to being too "dry" to pray at times, when she finds that saying a *Hail Mary* or an *Our Father* "very slowly...cheer me up and nourish my soul with divine food."¹⁴

For Thérèse, "the power of prayer is certainly wonderful."¹⁵ Here she could have "free access" to God and "obtain everything she asks."¹⁶ She teaches that beautiful, formal prayers that are written and published by others for specific purposes are not the only way to be heard by God.

I have not the courage to make search for wonderful prayers in books; there are so many of them, and it gives me a headache...I...do not know which to choose, I just act like a child who can't read; I tell God, quite simply, all I want to say, and He always understands.¹⁷

.....

Prayer for me is simply a raising of the heart, a simple glance toward Heaven, an expression of love and gratitude in the midst of trial, as well as in

¹⁴ Thérèse of Lisieux, Story of a Soul, trans. Day, 173.

¹⁵ Ibid., 172.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 172-73.

times of joy; in a word, it is something noble and supernatural expanding my soul and uniting it to God.¹⁸

In addition to the hours she spent in prayer both in community at choir with the other sisters, during the solitude of the working hours, and in private moments in her cell, the quality of the prayer time was concentrated and distilled. The way St. Thérèse did Bible study was intertwined with her prayers. She read in the scriptures and contemplated what it means to be beloved children of a loving parent, who wants to know what is on our minds, our thoughts, ideas, dreams and difficulties. She taught we need to spend time together with God, in quiet, just being present together. The life of a contemplative is all prayer, study, silence and worship. The Carmelite order is most austere in order to keep life free for prayer and the power prayer contributes to the Church and its leaders.

“I Turn to the Gospels”

As a young girl Thérèse was described as an avid reader. As she grew up and had a certainty that her life would be short her reading turned more and more to the Gospels. Her writings are generously seasoned with biblical references. Hardly a page goes by without some verse or story and if one does then the next page will have several biblical references.

In May of the year she died, she said,

As for me, with the exception of the Gospels, I no longer find anything in books. The Gospels are enough. I listen with delight to these words of Jesus which tell me all I must do: ‘Learn of me for I am meek and humble of heart’;

¹⁸ Ibid.

then I'm at peace, according to His sweet promise: 'and you will find rest for your souls.'¹⁹

In addition to her frequent use of scripture, Thérèse has command of one of the Bible's major themes; how God's interaction with people through time instructs us in God's love for us. A significant contribution Thérèse makes to lay people and the clergy is that one need not be a biblical scholar, proficient in ancient languages to become a competent student of the Bible. She is declared a missionary and a spiritual giant, praised for her faith. Pope John Paul, while declaring her a doctor of the church, falls short of emphasizing her teaching and the theology of the "little way" as most important. In his closing prayer at the homily he delivered on October 22, 1997, at St. Peter's square he did thank God for "for the wisdom you gave her, making her an exceptional witness and teacher of life for the whole Church!"²⁰ However, to his credit he does mention in number five of his seven point homily that Thérèse did

not only grasp and describe the profound truth of Love as the center and the heart of the Church, ...but she lived it intensely. It is precisely this *convergence of doctrine and concrete experience*, [emphasis his] of truth and life, of teaching and practice which shines with particular brightness in this saint and which makes her an attractive model....by returning to the essentials, this new doctor of the Church proves to be remarkably effective in enlightening the mind and heart of those who hunger and thirst for truth and love.²¹

In her autobiography, The Story of a Soul, she quotes from the Bible well over one hundred times,²² one hundred forty references to be more accurate. Careful reading

¹⁹ Thérèse of Lisieux, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, Her Last Conversations, trans. John Clarke (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publication, 1977), 44.

²⁰ Pope John Paul II, "Pope John Paul II Declares-St. Thérèse, Doctor of the Church," in St. Thérèse, by Franciscan Friars, 66-71.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 70.

²² T. Bird, "St. Thérèse and the Scriptures," in Christian Simplicity in St. Thérèse, ed. Michael Day (London: Burns Oates, 1953), 123. "*The Story of a soul* is not a big book, yet it contains more than 130 quotations from the Bible."

of her story reveals how she developed her mission, bringing souls to God by the love of God for us as especially revealed to her through her familiarity with the Bible. This was a major component of her “little way” that we place our trust into God’s care as a child relies upon a good earthly parent. Even the first part of Thérèse’s religious name, Of the Child Jesus, was her choice to remember this relationship. Trust, surrender, reliance upon God, humility, joy and exuberance, honesty, as well as playfulness are all qualities she emulates from her understanding of the child-inspired qualities necessary for both faithfulness to God and leadership on behalf of God for the Church..

From the Hebrew Scriptures, Psalms, Isaiah, Wisdom, Proverbs, Canticles, Ecclesiastes, Jonah, Joel, and Ezekiel were used. In the New Testament she concentrated on the Gospels. Thérèse uses more citings from Luke than any other book, but she selects longer passages from John. She also referred to several Epistles: Romans, Corinthians, and Timothy, especially.

The basis of her theology is established on the following three point foundation. (The NRSV translation of the Bible will be used.) First, “She calls from the highest places.... ‘You that are simple, turn in here!’” (Prov. 9: 3b-4). Second, “He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep” (Isaiah 40: 11). Third, “and you shall nurse and be carried on her arm, and dandled on her knees. As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you” (Isaiah 66: 12b-13a). This foundation will be addressed more fully in Chapter 4 in regard to gender.

From the New Testament the longest passage quoted is John 17: 4-16,

I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

.....
 I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.

Thérèse's use of scripture shows her involvement with the living God, through the personhood of Jesus, whom she experiences as present to her, instructing her by the Holy Spirit. She proclaims union with Christ and invites those who are attracted to her voice, to participate in the same powerful, instructive opportunity and blessing, even in the face of extreme doubts, synonymous to the "darkness of night." In other words deep doubts do not separate us from God's love.

This is an important aspect of her courage, and her appeal. She teaches by example and opens up for those who come after her, a guide book, her legacy, a last will and testament, a model to use Pope John Paul's word. This helps explain why her autobiography continues to be so helpful and why the demand spread into the need for 150 different language translations.

Her honest account of trust in God in the throes of doubt, despair and approaching death appeals to the soldier in the foxhole as well as to the missionary far from home, or those lonely at the top, who grapple with doubt and decision making and the trials of politics. She was able, through her writings to draw women and men, lay people and religious, as well as those who had no faith or whose faith had failed or lapsed, to revitalize these diverse souls with her theology and teaching of “the little way.”

She is always concerned with Love. How much God loves us, and how we are to respond by loving others, especially the ones whom we find it most difficult to love. She refers to Luke 14.12-14, the admonition not to court the graces of family, friends, the rich and the powerful, but to entertain the outcasts of society, the needy, the afflicted, people who are crippled, blind, those in need of assistance, and “you will be blessed because they cannot repay you.” Thérèse shows how her “little way” of kindness is to become a way of life in order to give pleasure to God.

Our word “religion” which has come to mean the service and worship of God, comes from the old Latin, *religio*, which used to mean one’s way of life, how one walked. I believe Thérèse helps people reclaim a more vital religion, because she advances beyond the realm of private spirituality, and into the dangerous public sector, where changing how we walk, and talk and interact in community becomes life changing, even political.

Although during her life as a nun she turned to Carmel in order to perfect her love of God, she never turned her back on the world. She chose to forgo eternity to continue her work here on earth. She appears in the public sector as St. Thérèse, patron of

missions, and Doctor of the Church, teacher and theologian, reforming and revitalizing the Church through her writings, her example, and her “little way.”

She creates a new matrix for doing religion, one where simple is best. Where thick, dusty books that put us to sleep are not as helpful as short sections of scripture, applied as our daily assignments. No papers due, no pop quizzes, no difficult deadlines, we are to stay awake to our calling to love, to choose the higher ground, to trust God’s promises and to claim truth in words and acts, relationally, out in the world. Piety, prayer, and private devotion have their place. They are to reinforce, support the real work of getting along together, within our families, the marketplace and as nations.

What she began as her autobiography has become a handbook for many, bridging what was first individual help into collective instruction. In the new Catholic Catechism, one of the results of Vatican II, St. Thérèse and her writings are quoted six times, more than that of any other woman. By becoming a saint and a doctor of the church, Thérèse has left the cloister and is forever a citizen of the world.

In Her Last Conversations, Clarke has included a Biblical Index of scriptural references used in private conversations from April until Thérèse’s death on September 30, 1897.²³ The list is consistent with her previous writings and once again serves to confirm that she was consistent until her last breath to her theology. Her last words were, “My God, I love you.”²⁴ This symmetry with which she lived her life is at the heart of why she is so helpful. She didn’t have a public self and a private self; she presented a unified self, authentically dedicated to living out her doctrine of the way of childhood.

²³ Thérèse of Lisieux, Last Conversations, 333.

²⁴ Thérèse of Lisieux, Story of a Soul, trans. Clarke (1996), 271.

Her Doctrine of “Spiritual Childhood” and\ or “The Little Way”

Although Thérèse did not use the combination of words, “spiritual childhood,” most of the writers who have chosen Thérésian studies have determined that her “little way of childhood” is best described as her doctrine of spiritual childhood. Only André Combs refrains from using this label. I agree with his staying close to the language St. Thérèse used. It may be that Mother Agnes, to whom Thérèse did give editorial carte blanche, may have coined the phrase herself, as De Meester suggests,²⁵ but this is unlikely because it indicates the work of a redactor other than Pauline, whose changes were most often those of spelling, punctuation, or of leaving out intimate details she considered too personal to the family members.

Since the term Spiritual Childhood requires more explanation than the child-like way that Thérèse so often spoke of, it rings of the work of priests and theologians trained in western religious systematics. She kept her language clear and close to the scriptures she held so dear. She didn’t go down dusty hallways of obscure libraries. By her own admission she found this kind of writing incapable of holding her attention. Like many students of the Bible she spoke with the eloquence, power, and brevity of truth.

This kind of use of language is recognizable in the speaking and writing of Abraham Lincoln, as well. Those who know scripture and apply it to the way they live have a courage that cuts through needing to be long in speech and well praised by their peers. At Gettysburg, the great preacher, statesman and orator, Edward Everett, who was the keynote speaker, had spoken for two hours just prior to Lincoln. The President’s

²⁵ Conrad De Meester, The Power of Confidence: Genesis and Structure of the “Way of Spiritual Childhood” of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, trans. Susan Conroy (Staten Island, N.Y.: Alba House, 1998), 4.

address lasted just over two minutes. Everett's comment to Lincoln was "You have said it all." And we remember the words of Lincoln's Gettysburg address and most aren't even aware of the name of the great orator and clergyman, let alone what he took two hours to say.

Relegating Thérèse's work to *spiritual* childhood is harmful, although it is considered a "beautiful formula" by De Meester²⁶ and one he feels is justified. But the separation of the everydayness of life from the spiritual, disagrees with St. Thérèse's wonderful ability to keep them united. Because her whole theology is a unified approach to a way of living in the world, it is incomplete to designate it as primarily spiritual. The real genius of her work is that she was able to combine the spiritual with the everyday and not separate them. She also left directions of "the way" for others to follow.

By becoming as trusting as children again, and believing God's promises and genuine concern for our mistakes as well as our accomplishments, Thérèse shows us by example how to play at becoming children of God, which is the cardinal point of her "way." There is a second aspect of childhood as important as the first.

The ability of trying a new task again and again until it is mastered without giving up seems to be natural to children, but if not repugnant to adults, at least embarrassing, or humiliating. Anyone who has observed a toddler who is just beginning to walk has an excellent example or a parable for this quality of regaining childhood:

(1) Get on your feet. No easy accomplishment. (2) Find and maintain balance. This is really necessary. (3) Now, one foot at a time, step out in trust, believing this will work. Ker-plunk! (4) The fall. This is not the end but an opportunity for another chance to try

²⁶ Ibid., 4.

again, and again ... Again. What fun! (5) I can accomplish this! I can whiz around. I'm fast and powerful. But one is still a toddler. Her "little way of childhood" seeks to keep us humble in the realization that we must keep at these tasks of living in community.

Finding ways to keep trying, with joy rather than with embarrassment, to be in relationship with the less beautiful, the less powerful, because this is pleasing to God, are just some of the areas for the application of her doctrine. But because her model is familiar to us, so recognizable as a way we have already learned, we can reclaim it and apply it to any area of life.

Her influences in the lives of millions and indeed upon the church itself are due in part to the simplicity and the truthful purity with which she has explained significant scriptures from Jesus and from the Hebrew texts that announced him. She didn't need to write tomes, because she went straight to the heart of the matter and spoke with confidence and authority as one who knows Jesus. She understands and uses his concentrated distilled use of language that cuts through lengthy theological systems, often using a simple narrative style with new symbols, for example the elevator and the rubber ball, that are easy to recognize, playful, and understandable.

Humility and Power

Here are some examples of how she spoke about her own evolution into becoming as a little child.

"I am the little brush...which Jesus has chosen to paint His likeness on the souls you have entrusted to my care," which was the herald of the "masterpiece to come."²⁷

²⁷ Thérèse of Lisieux, Story of a Soul, trans. Day, 164-65.

She calls herself the little ball with whom the child Jesus can play. I taught elementary school for seven years and in that capacity I was reminded on a daily basis that most children don't hold a grudge. With help from other children or a gentle, kind adult almost every child would rather get back into the group after messing up, or being hurt. They are willing to let go of the problem for the sake of the hope of beginning afresh. If this is due to the humility and innocence of childhood, adults seem to forget the power of this kind of readily available forgiveness in action. Often overly concerned with the avoidance of pain or the need to be right, vindicated or protected from further humiliation, adults perfect the art of digging in, holding the line, putting up barriers, starting wars.

St. Thérèse while perfecting the little way of childhood (humility) in her own life was aware of the power and importance of her work, her writings, and her life as a saint. Part of her awareness of her power was in her prophetic ability to claim her future honors and achievements before she died and to make the connection between this life and the next! Yet, she maintained a unique balance between humility and power. She wrote how she understood how God works with our desires in bringing forth good fruit on behalf of the community and that we are not to measure our successes or shortcomings by the ways of the world.

Hidden away in a relatively poor convent in Normandy, with no contact with the outside world beyond limited visits with a few family members, and her two missionary companions-by-correspondence, Father Bellière a seminarian in Bayeux, preparing for foreign missions to Algiers,²⁸ and Father Roulland in China, a young woman wrote a

²⁸ Thérèse of Lisieux, Story of a Soul, trans. Clarke (1996), 251.

short autobiography of her brief life that continues to speak to readers today in powerful ways. One of the ways that Hollywood measures the popularity of a blockbuster movie is not just how many people flock to it, but will people come to see it again and bring their friends.

This is part of the power of St. Thérèse's writing. Her seemingly simple, flowery little book cannot be fully appreciated in a superficial once over. It is in revisiting her work again and again that the power of her simplicity and humility begin to make sense and are able to take hold. Msgr. Vernon Johnson at first considered her to be "an appalling pious little prig!"²⁹ Dorothy Day wrote that when she was first handed a copy of Thérèse's autobiography she considered it to be trivial, somewhat trite.³⁰ These are just two of many similar examples of people who not only changed their opinions about St. Thérèse, but who enthusiastically gave her credit for helping them make noteworthy changes in their own lives.

Living all of her adult life in the society of women, she wrote in a woman's way of a woman's experience. Her work did not need to pass muster or face the surveillance and corrections of the male establishment. She was outside the sphere of their control and their misunderstanding. This presented her with a freedom that otherwise would have crippled her style, which was the ability to write down her own experiences in her own words, what Nelle Morton called "hearing one another to speech."³¹

²⁹ Franciscan Friars, *St. Thérèse: Doctor of the Little Way*, 79.

³⁰ J. Leon Hooper, "Dorothy Day's Transposition of Thérèse's 'Little Way.'" *Theological Studies* 63, no. 1 (March 2002): 68-86. [journal on-line]; accessed 12 Nov. 2002; available from Super-User [root@hwweb.hwwilsonweb.com].

³¹ Nelle Morton, *The Journey Is Home* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 55

CHAPTER 4

THE RELEVANCE of GENDER

Is it a Girl or a Boy?

When a child is born the first question asked is most often, is it a girl or a boy? The first thing the delivery nurse or obstetrician volunteers to the mother is this same information. It's a girl! Or, you have a boy! Gender identification and the time of birth are the first items of legal business in the life of the new born. Gender is relevant from the minute we are born of woman. How we think, learn, develop personality and a rational, ethical self are all deeply affected by gender.

If indeed women do think and process life differently than men, as Gilligan's research shows, then this will be observable in Thérèse's autobiography. First, then comes the quest to find how Thérèse thought. What were her thinking patterns? How did she relate in community, subjectively or objectively? How did she appropriate the stories she chose to lift up in her Bible study? And finally, how has the patriarchy responded to her contributions? This will be addressed in Chapter 5 as implications of feminist caring.

By taking a detailed look at "women's development in faith communities" from the work of Prof. Carol Lakey Hess on "caretaking and being genuine,"¹ a case can be made that Thérèse had grown to the highest of the three stages in the progression of

¹ Carol Lakey Hess, Caretakers of Our Common House: Women's Development in Faith Communities of Faith (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997) 89.

ethical care in Gilligan's typology: the first being personal survival, or one's own needs, to the next, sacrifice for others, to the third, which is termed, mutuality, with truth realized "in concrete communities...not a lofty vision."² St. Thérèse expresses similar values in describing that the very best and holiest kind of living was honest and free from illusions.³

While Piaget and Erikson were making their contributions to the mapping of human development they were concerned with male development and learning. Girls were not quite capable of reaching the separation or differentiation necessary for autonomous moral development. Their norm was the male and therefore females were less than normal. If and when considered at all, females were found inconsistent, wanting, or too insignificant to be of any account at all.

Freud was concerned with female psychological development but saw adolescent girls as missing necessary parts for this development. Of course, he never sat around in a circle of girls and discussed the cost and the joy of womanhood as depicted by such open questions, "Are you wearing a bra yet, or have you started your periods?" Girls do not feel castrated as Freud suggests, but empowered by the amazing changes they are experiencing. In my experience, girls do not discuss the envy of male genitals, whereas, boys seem to give significant attention to the changing silhouettes of the girls. This may not be breast envy, to parallel Freud's language, but there does seem to be a coveting at least.

But then these pioneers in the ongoing discussion of who we are and how we become that were basing their progress on the work of other patriarchs who had preceded

² Ibid., 90.

³ Thérèse of Lisieux, Story of a Soul, trans. Day, 126.

them. In the church the Fathers have left a difficult legacy from which to gain a toehold and climb. Jerome was a misogynist, Augustine saw women as baby manufacturers, and Thomas Aquinas believed women were created by God, but were weaker than men, and therefore subordinate and inferior to men. One need not go further back in western thought, say to Aristotle, or fast forward to Luther, to provide a larger historical pool for additional examples. The story doesn't get more positive on behalf of more than half of humankind. Women are viewed as the ones who must be denied leadership on the basis of gender.

It was into this world that both Thérèse Martin and French feminist Dr. Madeleine Pelletier were born. Just one year after Thérèse, Madeleine (Anne) Pelletier, the most radical, militant feminist of France's first wave of feminists, was born in Paris. She also had high hopes for an adult vocation. She intended to become a general when she grew up. Her mother told her women weren't soldiers, 'they are nothing at all....They marry, cook and raise their children.'⁴ Pelletier became the

first woman to enter the state psychiatric service" while also doing "research in anthropology and psychiatry, joined the Socialist Party...rose rapidly in the party's ranks, headed a feminist group, The Solidarity of Women, edited a feminist journal, *La Suffragiste*, campaigning for women's rights over a wide range of issues: the right to work, to vote and most daringly for the period, for women to have recourse to contraception and abortion...she adopted a masculine style of dress and cut her hair short...appeared deeply shocking even to feminist...colleagues.⁵

Pelletier's story is not the topic of this work, but because her story is contemporary to

⁴ Felicia Gordon, *The Integral Feminist: Madeleine Pelletier, 1874-1939* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 1. Gordon is quoting Pelletier, '*Doctoresse Pelletier : mémoires d'une féministe*' (Fonds Marie-Louise Bouglé), 1.

⁵ Ibid., Gordon is writing. 2.

Thérèse and well worth reading she has been included to illustrate that things were happening in history and in women's lives that collectively would have tremendous impact and produce changes throughout the western world. It is interesting to note that George Sand died in 1876. Women took the few avenues open to them, often at great personal cost, and made freeways out of footpaths. Our foremothers literally laid down their lives for our possibilities.

Mary Bryden (it appears as a footnote in her article in Literature and Theology) writes:

In a feminist reading, Monica Furlong argues convincingly that, to a young woman of Thérèse's strong will and idealism, the convent might have represented a challenging (and therefore attractive) alternative to a life of housekeeping and childbearing. Monica Furlong, *Thérèse of Lisieux* (London: Virago, 1987).⁶

I am not implying that Thérèse and Madeleine were in contact with one another in any way, but there was a strong ferment in France and England as well as in America for women to seek education, self-determination, control over reproduction, and a voice in the academy.

And yet it is only very recently in the history of the academy that the voice of the women is heard in the land. The last quarter of a century has brought sweeping changes in inclusive language, course offerings on women's issues, women in history and Matristics, more women in faculty positions, and in the crucially important decision-making arenas of power. The additions to the libraries in new fields of study are as important as they are impressive: women's studies, feminist ethics, feminist theology, womanist studies, to name just a few examples.

⁶ Bryden, "Saints and Stereotypes," 16.

There have been significant changes in the classrooms, also. How desks and tables are arranged, who is called on to speak. Hearing a teacher say, "Let's not speak a second time until each one has had a turn to respond," has gone a long way in allowing women permission to contribute their ideas and participation into discussions where men formerly took the floor. These ideas are expanded in the following section.

So Great a Cloud of Witnesses

Building upon the work of Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, Sojourner Truth, Simone de Beauvoir, Germaine Greer, Betty Freidan, Gloria Steinem, Bella Abzug, and Shirley Chisholm, who spoke out and helped the cause of women's rights, each new generation is able to benefit from the arduous work of those who have gone before.

Through the power of literature, poets and artists like Maya Angelou, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison have brought the rich beauty and strength of their voices as well as the deep honesty of pain and passion of their experiences into the conversations that inform women's extensive experiences.

In the field of religion, authors and teachers such as: Nelle Morton, Anne McGrew Bennett, Joan Morris, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Mary Daly, Letty Russell, Phyllis Trible, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Karen Jo Torjesen, Marjorie Suchocki, Carol Gilligan, Carol Lakey Hess and Ellen Mott Marshal have forged new ways of thinking and doing the difficult work of scholarship, teaching, trailblazing, and leadership.

These lists are not meant to be exhaustive but rather representative of the ongoing, inter-relatedness of the conversations in feminist thought that bridge many disciplines and are creating new ways to structure thought, classroom experience, research, and the way we experience ourselves and community.

Women's Way of Teaching

Is there something called a Feminist Pedagogy? In 1976, at Claremont School of Theology (then School of Theology at Claremont) women students were addressed by some of the professors with the daily greeting, "Good morning, gentlemen." At Pacific School of Religion, entering students were shown a film with a title something like, "Mr. Smith Goes to Seminary."⁷ It had been filmed at PSR years before. Mr. Smith arrived in his three piece dark suit, Dick Tracy hat and brief case. He was joined by a number of his fellow clones.

The new students laughed. It had become silly by contrast to the reality of the picture. Half the student body was now made up of women. Yet at the graduation in 1976 the opening hymn was "Rise Up, O Men of God." Women were hurt, embarrassed and angry, while most men, faculty and graduates alike, could not understand their pain, grief and deep sadness at what these women considered blatant exclusion.

But then, the reading lists were still in male exclusive language. All the tenured professors were male. Freud, Piaget and Erikson as well as Jerome, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Martin Luther still held sway. Women had to petition if they even wanted

⁷ The title is close enough to give the right idea.

to add a woman's name to approved lists for research topics. Permission was not always given.

Women were on the planning committee for the next year's graduation, however. To say that seminary was a difficult place for many women at that time would be an understatement. For some it was even a dangerous place, psychologically, spiritually and sexually. We had such enormous doubts about being able to be true to our own inner voice and conscience while doing the work of mistressing⁸ the course loads.

One ray of hope was that visiting faculty members were most often the new women theologians. The windows of change were opening, and the fresh air this introduced would in time be called the new pedagogy, a feminist pedagogy. Both women and men felt empowered by being heard and treated with respect. The following are some of the ways that I experienced some of the differences in the old patriarchy and the new feminist pedagogy.

First, if architecturally possible, desks were moved into circles, people could see each other's faces. Inclusive language was heard, even insisted upon. If desks and tables could not be moved then people would be mixed into smaller groups for discussion; that is, we would move ourselves into conversation groups resembling circles. Classrooms were becoming spaces where people were encouraged to be relational. Professors still lectured, but they were modeling ways of interacting with the information and each other that fostered exciting changes in how students were learning. To use the vocabulary of Karen Torjesen, "scholarship" was becoming "collaborative."⁹

⁸ I cannot bring myself to use the word "mastering" in this context.

⁹ Karen Jo Torjesen, When Women Were Priests: Women's Leadership in the Early Church and the Scandal of their Subordination in the Rise of Christianity (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), vii.

But what was most helpful to students was the sharing of the expectations the teacher had up front, at the beginning, to model by the teaching style and example. By demanding that the students be able to identify how other authors on the reading lists shared their patterns for intellectual discovery, this new way of learning was reinforced. The old style kept everything a mystery only to be discovered by the very few, protected, guarded, and withheld.

The old bell curve was sounding its last toll. Feminist teachers would say, "Here is what an excellent paper looks like." The old style reinforced control, the new rewarded freedom from old oppression. Women's Studies programs were a growing force to be reckoned with, springing forth from the hopes, dreams and the hard work of this second wave of feminists into the reality of today. The following statistics help show the progress in measurable numbers. The growth in the lives of individuals, both women and men, is immeasurable.

In 1960, there were approximately sixteen courses devoted to the topic of women and gender. In 1970, the first women's studies program in the United States was approved at San Diego State University (Stimpson). By the mid 1990's, the number of women's studies programs had grown to approximately 620 (Howe.). A study conducted by the American Council on Education found that 68 percent of American universities offered courses in women's studies, 48.9 percent of four-year colleges, and 26.5 percent of two-year colleges ("Women's Studies," as cited in Klein).¹⁰

These gains were not automatic, nor are they guaranteed. They were achieved by the brilliant scholarship, vision, hours of arduous labor, strategy, cooperation, and tenacity of many, on as many fronts and fields. Designing programs without budgets, finding the means for travel without funding in place, securing meals without expense

¹⁰ Introduction to Feminist Approaches to Theory and Methodology: An Interdisciplinary Reader, ed. Sharlene Hesse-Biber, Christina Gilmartin, and Robin Lydenberg (New York: Oxford University

accounts, stretched the creativity and resourcefulness of women and also taught the importance of budget setting and getting on agendas for future needs.

These gains will be maintained by remembering the story of our own history. We must remember and retell the narratives of women's struggle to maintain women's history, a central place in history, with the conceptual production of ideas and innovation for change within the human community that women deliver. Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza is correct in saying that women must claim authority and never abdicate the vocation of the power of feminist Discipleship of Equals in which she writes:

We must never abandon our religious power to articulate a feminist theological naming to transform patriarchal religions, a power that for centuries has been stolen from us and today is threatened again in various ways.¹¹

She warns that a sure way of having our authority and power stolen “involves the loss of historical memory,”¹² and that “historical forgetfulness...threatens to undermine...this very progress.”¹³ She cites Australian feminist scholar, Dale Spender, who admonishes in her book, Women of Ideas (and What Men Have Done to Them), that the idea of silent, invisible, powerless women of intellectual history is necessary to the “perpetuation and hegemony of patriarchal power in the academy.”¹⁴ Hear again in Schussler Fiorenza's voice:

Feminist thinkers and artists disappear from historical records and consciousness because the continuation of patriarchy requires that feminist challenges to elite male power remain invisible and nonexistent. Generation after generation feminists again and again must reinvent the “wheel,” so to speak, and with hard intellectual labor discover and re-create a critical feminist systemic

Press, 1999) 1, n.1. This information is based on the research of Catherine R. Stimpson, Florence Howe, and Julie Thompson Klein.

¹¹ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Discipleship of Equals: A Critical Feminist Ekklesia-logy of Liberation (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 3.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 4.

¹⁴ Ibid. Here Schussler Fiorenza is quoting Dale Spender, Women of Ideas (London: ARK Paperbacks, 1983).

analysis of patriarchy. Needless to say, the emancipatory intellectual history and creative vision of women in biblical religions have also suffered from historical forgetfulness. By constructing this cartography of the struggles for my own theological voice, I seek to prevent such a loss of theological consciousness and history.¹⁵

The energy required to keep reinventing women's very right to the power of speech, of decision making, and authority to make change is enormous but the alternative of remaining silent and invisible is untenable. Therefore, keeping our story of the struggle and progress of recent history before the entire community is essential for the best use of human resources. Then what could possibly be the problem, one might ask, and how does all this relate to St. Thérèse of Lisieux. Let me explain.

All the major institutions of power are still in the domain of the patriarchy. It is true that women and minorities are present and have made importantly significant contributions and do have a voice and in some rare instances actually are in positions of authority. By and large, however, men are still the presidents of countries, universities, publishing houses, banks, communications industries, et cetera with a few notable exceptions.

Even when women do exemplary work in positions of real power, they are very seldom succeeded by another woman, while the reverse is almost always true, i.e., all men are not judged as incompetent if one man fails to excel. Women are most often punished by a backlash when their good work threatens men. When we are no longer self-conscious of gender with regards to power and decision making, feminists will then and only then have accomplished the goals for the long haul.

The church lags behind the secular world in recognizing and utilizing women as leaders. Women speak of the stained-glass ceiling as a euphemism for the barriers that

¹⁵ Schussler Fiorenza, 4.

are placed upon women who are competent, and are seeking promotions that are slow in coming in career advancement and earnings.

Until the time when women and men are awarded equal pay for equal work, it is important to grasp the understanding that the patriarchal institutions still have the final word. Even though it is harder to silence and overlook women's work, it is still possible to reinterpret, redefine and edit the voice and scholarship of women.

By categorizing women's work into safe areas, men still continue to hold a control over thought which can be both subtle and dishonest. For example, most of the important work in the field of Thérèsian studies has been done by men. Because the church has difficulty recognizing the real contributions of women, these contributions are renamed and classified by these men into safe areas for women, i.e. in the case of Thérèse, into the fields of spirituality and missions, rather than theology, pedagogy, church history and reform.

The patriarchy fell in love with her, made use of her genius, then categorized her into the arena where her contributions did not conflict with the patriarchal ability to control the destiny of millions of other women. By making her first a saint, she became eligible to be made a doctor of the church. But the priesthood is still withheld. She is called a saint but seldom theologian, master teacher, reformer, which of course is what she was.

What Does It Look Like When Women Are Scholars and Theologians?

When the second wave of feminist scholars began to be published, the circle was small enough that there lacked the critical interaction that is now possible. It was so encouraging to hear women's voices that there was a tendency to just soak it all in. We were like living sponges who had never encountered water until now. Something resonated that for too long had been absent from western historical thought and that was the voice coming from women's wisdom based in women's experience. Women were even bringing the language about God into question. The words of Mary Daly, "If God is male, then the male is God."¹⁶ make a powerful statement that is difficult to rebut.

As there began to be more and more feminists in dialogue with one another the names for a variety of feminist categories began to be heard. A whole new vocabulary developed: radical feminists, feminist hermeneutics of suspicion, ecofeminist, et cetera. From the Foreword to Feminist Approaches to Theory and Methodology: An Interdisciplinary Reader¹⁷ we find,

From time to time in academia, shared need, individual talent, strong commitment, valued resources, and venturesome leadership align to transcend organizational and discipline boundaries. When they do, powerful collaborations can take hold. Fields of scholarship can gain momentum and intellectual lives can flourish.¹⁸

This is just such a time. For more than thirty years now this is how feminists have been working at many places. The results have been liberating, inclusive of more and

¹⁶ Mary Daly, Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation (1973; reprint, Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 19.

¹⁷ Sharlene Hesse-Biber, Christina Gilmartin and Robin Lydenberg, eds., forward to Feminist Approaches to Theory and Methodology (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), v.

¹⁸ Ibid.

more diversity, and even in some instances unimaginable progress, and yet these gains as wonderful as they are, are still vulnerable to the time and tides of patriarchal power.

There have been countless times throughout history when women have been unfettered. These are always times of renaissance and creativity when the human family makes strides forward.

From the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth-centuries in England many women were called forth into positions of power. They spoke effectively with voices of authority. Preachers, teachers, administrators and evangelists in Quaker, Revivalist, i.e. Wesleyan Methodist, Primitive Methodist and Bible Christians, and the Salvation Army denominations all had significant numbers of women on their official rolls as ministers of the Gospel, ordained to preach and to administer the official roles as leaders in the church.¹⁹

Most often serving the working poor and the destitute, often in very difficult situations, for less than enough to live on, these women of God, called by God, found their voices to preach the Good News as people began to make their way from the country into the towns and cities at the beginning of the manufacturing and industrial revolution and well into the Victorian Age.

Rosemary Radford Ruether has found that of 615 English women who were published between 1600 and 1700 virtually all were Quaker women.

Quaker writers, men and women, supported women's preaching and evangelizing in public, as well as women's participation in internal church leadership through the women's meetings. In their tracts, especially those by women, an exegetical argument was developed, showing that equality of the sexes in the image of God was God's original plan for creation, undone by sin, but

¹⁹ Phyllis Mack, "In a Female Voice: Preaching and Politics in Eighteenth-Century British Quakerism," in *Women Preachers and Prophet through Two Millennia of Christianity*, ed. Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 248-63.

continually renewed and advanced through God's prophetic gifts, fulfilled in the coming of Christ and the founding of the Christian community. The most developed expression of this feminist hermeneutic is found in the writings of Margaret Fell, especially her 1666 tract, "Women Speaking Justified, according to the Scriptures."²⁰

Ruether goes on to say,

I was charmed by the way Quaker women and men turned on their heads the arguments from the New Testament against women's right to preach. Mary Cole and Priscilla Cotton, in their tract written from prison, "To the priests and people of England, we Declare our Conscience" (1656), argue that the text in I Corinthians 14:34 telling women to keep silence in order to hear from those inspired women and men who had received the Spirit, as evidenced by Paul's reference to women praying and prophesying in I Corinthians 11:5.²¹

During the revivalism of the late 1700s, working women in the church were vicars, preachers, teachers and leaders of men and women. Class and gender gave way to the urgency of the revival call. Women could preach that there were no longer male and female and lived the example.

The lives of these earlier women clergy are fascinating to discover. The list of their names reaches into the hundreds: Sarah Kirkland, Ann Mason, Lydia Murfin, Elizabeth Leavers, Mary Sims, Miss Alice Bembridge, as well as Susannah Wesley to name just a few. Women were at the height of their opportunity to serve from 1790 until 1850 when things began to change for the worse for women. (What ever became of those wonderful women circuit riders?)

Gradually, it became no longer respectable for women's concerns to be addressed from the pulpit. The Victorian age brought with it a kind of pseudo-respectability where matters of the home were once again to be handled within the home, with the man as the

²⁰ Rosemary Radford Ruether, foreword to Hidden in Plain Sight: Quaker Women's Writings, 1650-1700, ed. Mary Garman, et al. (Wallingford, Pa.: Pendle Hill, 1996), xiv.

²¹ Ibid.

head. Histories can be expunged in as short a time as one generation. Fifty or one hundred years can bury almost every trace of a lifetime of effort and accomplishment. Even an entire movement can be obliterated unless there are those with the ability, time and access to do research and to write, to reclaim the facts whether these are in diaries, private libraries, contained within the oral history or in obituaries and on grave-stones.

In studying these cycles of historical forgetfulness a pattern emerges. When social situations are too difficult or unrewarding financially or socially for the patriarchal institutions to *manage*, women come to the forefront and contribute with their lives to the well-being of others out of their profound sense of caring. Florence Nightingale, Jane Addams, and Mother Theresa of Calcutta are examples of this kind of caring for the poorest of the poor and those without a voice. As soon as the situations become *manageable* again, or profitable, women experience a loss of leadership, acceptance and control. Beware of the backlash.

Karen Jo Torjesen's use of language, that it is indeed scandalous that women have been subordinated in the church,²² is correctly descriptive and insightful. Her historical work in regard to women and the priesthood is especially relevant to the discussion of women as "preachers, pastors, prophets and patrons."²³ Prof. Torjesen has cited convincing evidence of women's leadership in the early days of Christianity. The cover of her book features the mosaic of Theodora Episcopa, that is, Bishop Theodora, which adorns the chapel of the Church of Saint Praxedis in Rome, harkening back to a time

²² Torjesen, When Women Were Priests.

²³ Ibid., 9.

when women “held a place in the hierarchical service of the church.”²⁴ Joan Morris goes on to write, “These are stones that today cry out truths that have been hidden away.”²⁵

Recovering, retelling and remembering the history of women in the church is important to the life of the entire community, girls and boys and women and men, that not only exemplifies an ethic of care but one of justice as well. The truth of the scandal of the treatment and the oppression of women by the patriarchal hierarchical institution of the church is sinful as well as unjustifiable on historical and Biblical grounds. This wrong affects both men and women adversely as lies always do. In good conscience how can anyone defend the position from a standpoint of love or justice?

Lest we forget the stony road our foremothers have trod and have to continue to keep repeating this endless human resource consuming process of re-establishing a woman’s right to visibility, voice and choices regarding her vocation, we must remember our history. As women become comfortable with success and have access to the power of decision making, they must take care not to retreat into taking roles that traditionally had been the only ones open to them. Women must remain watchful that their work is not re-edited, revised and re-written in voices other than their own. Change always comes, sometimes for the better, sometimes not. When women do theology, we must always remain vigilant, visible and vocal.

It is with this sense of vigilance that I revisit St. Thérèse’s work to find her voice.

What was different about Thérèse’s work because she was a woman? What did her being

²⁴ Joan Morris, The Lady Was A Bishop: The Hidden History of Women with Clerical Ordination and Jurisdiction of Bishops (New York: Macmillan Company, 1973), 4.

²⁵ Ibid.

a woman contribute to her theology that was unique, in a "different voice?" I will rely on the research of psychologist Carol Gilligan, who has much to say about how women have a distinct voice, because her writings resonate with my own experience. In her book, In a Different Voice²⁶ that she began working on in the 1970s and which was first published in 1982 (now in its thirty-seventh printing), Gilligan has begun a discussion that is ongoing, sometimes heated, but always instructive. She is a most extensively read and quoted feminist writer in the field of female moral development which she has termed "an ethic of care." Gilligan's empirical research led her to write that girls and women most often interpret moral problems in a different voice than that of men and boys.

Gilligan's critics count her down for the implications of the term care as being just another form of nurturing that relegates and keeps women in their traditional roles as mothers and care givers. But this misses the two most significant contributions she did make. First, she not only questioned the sexism of former research, she designed a research tool to help establish what women had intuitively known but didn't have the data to establish. That is, that women approach thinking and problem solving from a different set of values.

Secondly, Gilligan uses the care language not as the cook and bottle washer, but with a deep sense of concern for feelings, and the overall implications of systems of justice which are not designed to help the human community deal with the complex issues. Bio-ethics, multi-cultural misunderstandings, and injustices to the silenced,

²⁶ Carol Gilligan, In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

faceless others, such as the battered woman, children, undocumented aliens and those who have few of the resources necessary to speak for themselves are just a few examples of the inter-related, complex areas of human experience where ethics of care are better designed to find what is best for most than a who is right, who is wrong approach.

Gilligan at least made a beginning that includes women as morally mature and capable of bringing balance and wisdom to decision making, which are necessary to any egalitarian forms of justice. Justice without care and care without justice both miss the mark of being the best of which human beings are capable.

Gilligan's contribution goes a long way in helping to establish criteria for women and men to listen and to hear and to value this combined, two ply yarn for knitting together a more complete concept of ethical human behavior and moral decision making.

Modern research and scholarship can shed light on Thérèse's writing, to show that her style was not just personal, as some have thought, but is a whole other way of writing theology. In an ethic of care, women center themselves within specific situations and describe ethics in terms of personal inter-relationships rather than in detailed objectivity that men value. Men prefer rules for judging behavior. Women want to determine who all will be affected by the moral decision.

Gilligan argues that one way is neither better nor inferior to the other, but that they are different perspectives. Two moral approaches are used as the way men and women think. These two perspectives, one a vision of justice, the other of care

recur in human experience. The moral injunctions not to act unfairly towards others, and not to turn away from someone in need, capture these different concerns.²⁷

²⁷ Carol Gilligan, "Moral Orientation and Moral Development," in Justice and Care: Essential Readings in Feminist Ethics, ed. Virginia Held (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1995), 32.

Gilligan found that although these differences are not gender specific they are gender related. I have developed a chart for ease of comparison.

**Psychological Identity and Moral Development
in
Two Distinct Voices²⁸**

	<u>Women</u>	<u>Men</u>
Patterns of Thinking:	contextual, narrative	formal, abstract
Way of Problem Solving:	emotions, feelings	rational, thoughts
Ways of Relating:	subjective	objective
Describes Information:	narrative	facts
Highest Value:	ethic of care	ethic of justice
Categorizes Knowledge By:	experience	thoughts
Issues of Dependency:	connected	detached
Resolving Conflict:	consensus	debate

Although Gilligan's work has received criticism for being stereotypic, the argument does not stand up to her explanation that her work did in fact indicate that most

²⁸ Carol Gilligan, Different Voice.

women and men do indeed process information and life situations differently. Her helpful contribution is to establish that women are not inferior, but that they do think differently and reach moral decisions from an alternative set of criteria. Because of her work, women can answer the faulty claim that women are somehow stunted in their moral development, or that they are incapable of moral decision making.

All along wise women have known that there was something wrong with leaving girls out of earlier studies and that if women were so flawed why were men in more trouble with the law? Women are just as interested in justice, but they also want to extend justice with an ethic of caring. Men care that people are not hurt unjustly, but they describe laws and rules as the best way to be fair and caring. Gilligan has provided new tools for the human family to communicate the important ways we try to be the best we can all be.

Hess builds on Gilligan's ethic of care and applies it to women's and girls interpretation of scripture for building up our selves and our communities.²⁹ To reclaim and reinterpret from the Bible that has often been used to clobber women, oppress them, and keep them diminished and devalued, her work is the second foot upon which I stand in doing my work on St. Thérèse's writing.

To summarize this chapter it does look different when women do scholarship and theology. They not only bring a different voice to the ethical dialogue, the voice is born out of women's experiences and considers caring for the whole community from a perspective that seeks mutuality and reciprocity from and for women and men.

²⁹ Hess, Caretakers of Our Common House.

Encouraging those who have been silent to find a voice increases the diversity as well as the base of experience.

Working on her own Thérèse discovered the biblical passages that spoke to her and undergirded her own development as a woman with a distinctly different voice. How else could she have captured and held the attention of millions and received the unprecedented attention she has received? She was not reiterating the catechism of the church. Thérèse was doing something new for the Catholics of her day and ours. She was thinking for herself, and claiming a higher degree of love, one of reciprocal care.

Using the tools she had, prayer and solitude, contemplation and the community and the Bible, her book of choice, she acquainted and familiarized herself with the rich treasury available to all who are willing to enter into the Word for inspiration, wisdom and direction.

This was not the common practice in Catholicism at the time of her work. Even priests spent their time reading the daily office, selections of scripture and other inspired writings. Unless one was a biblical scholar, extended reading of the bible was unusual, too Protestant. Hearing the bible read in one's own language, reading in the mother tongue are much more intimate and vital than the distance generated by the Latin. By creating an enormous audience for self-study, Thérèse was having an impact on the church. She had created a wave of hunger in the people, both clergy and laity that would influence popes and cardinals for change. The need had been awakened for a liturgy that was accessible and understandable. And the emphasis that would revitalize the church was Thérèse's emphasis on Love and service, of missions and evangelical focus, the Good News proclaimed, but even more impressively, it was to be lived out in daily life.

That is part of what Thérèse was articulating when she wrote, “In the heart of the church, I will be love.” She did indeed bring life and heartbeat back into the Church.

Thérèse’s method of bible study was described by her sisters as “Elle butinait,” that is she would settle on a passage, let it speak to her, taste its “honey,” then move on to another, lightly, “as a bee settles on a flower.” Monsignor Johnson describes her approach as “a simple method well suited to ordinary people – and it is primarily for such that St. Teresa [Thérèse] writes.”³⁰

In Chapter 3 the main points of her theology were introduced. They are gender related. First in Proverbs the She referred to is Wisdom. Beginning at verse one we read, “Wisdom has built her house... she has set her table. She has sent out her servant-girls, she calls from the highest places...Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Lay aside immaturity and live and walk in the way of insight.” This sounds very Eucharistic, and certainly relational and communal. No wonder it appealed to a young woman living in community, devoted to prayer and contemplation.

Thérèse loved the communion feast. She must have contemplated the presence of women at the table because she refers to desiring this experience for herself as a priest. She also teaches that God gives us these desires to guide our development. Leonardo da Vinci aside, according to scriptural accounts there were more present at the table than the men. Thérèse must have understood that when Mary was present in the upper room she was serving, presiding at the table. It was woman’s place to usher in Shabbat. To handle the bread and the wine, to say the prayers and to light the candles was woman’s work.

³⁰ Abbé Combes, ed., Collected Letters [of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux], trans. F. J. Sheed (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1949), xvi, in foreword by Vernon Johnson.

Women ushered in the Presence of God, the Shechinah. Just as she saw Wisdom personified as a woman in scripture, she envisioned Mary “as a priest at the alter offering [the body and the blood of] your beloved Jesus, the sweet Emmanuel.”³¹ This is from Thérèse’s last completed poem, “Why I Love You, O Mary!” considered by Thérèse to be “very important work,” perhaps as Kinney writes the “crowning achievement”³² of her life work.

Models are crucial and Thérèse found the models necessary for her own theological development in the positive examples of her gender in scripture and she claimed Jesus as her spiritual director.

Next, Thérèse grounded her teachings in the hauntingly beautiful words from Isaiah, chapter forty that uses shepherd imagery as the one who gathers the young to the breast, gently leading...and although Isaiah uses the generic he for the shepherd, women were shepherds, as well as men and the breast language certainly sounds hermeneutically suspicious to me.

Her third base for her platform is from Isaiah, chapter sixty-six. Here again Thérèse has chosen gender specific language.

And you shall nurse and be carried on her arm, and dandled on her knees. As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you.³³

Her theology evokes emotion, feelings of care. It is experiential, connected, and contextual. The major points to her theology are congruent with feminism, which will be explored in the next chapter. St. Thérèse finds the symbolism from the Bible that

³¹ Thérèse of Lisieux, *The Poetry of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux*, trans. Kinney, 220.

³² *Ibid.*, 211.

³³ Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, trans. Day, 193.

celebrates her gender and does so without the aid or assistance of men or the benefit of formal theological education.

However, what she does lift up is beneficial to both men and women. Bishops and priests alike were confounded by her ability to appropriate important biblical texts to the development of her Bible study without the help of seminary education. Thérèse shows what it looks like when women do theology. It is as caring as a Very Good Mother's Love.

CHAPTER 5

THE IMPLICATIONS of FEMINIST CARING

Feminism and Church Power

What is meant by the term feminism? For the purpose of this work it assumes that differences between women and men are not a valid criterion for the oppression or exclusion of women. Feminists contend that women are entitled to equal rights, privileges, and responsibilities that men enjoy in society and in the home. Valuing women's experience as central to human knowledge, Gilligan established in her research that women are contextual and relational in their thinking processes and ethical decision making processes.

From a time of being marginalized, patronized, and excluded from the canons of literature and legal decision making, because of the development of feminism, women are now in much stronger positions to be heard, respected and taken seriously. Feminism has certainly influenced curriculum at universities, called into serious question how research is conducted, insisted upon women's voice and women's experience to enact new laws governing contraception, abortion, sports programs for girls and women, child care, and access to employment to name just some areas of influence.

But where is the church in the discussion? Granted, women's ordination is now possible in more denominations in the last forty years, but are women really receiving equal pay for equal work? Is the local church eager to receive women as the pastor or

minister? There are some impressive examples of outstanding women who have reached the higher positions of senior minister or even bishop, but it is far more likely that women will be called to smaller churches, struggling churches, or places men won't consider serving.

The church is exempt from Title VII laws prohibiting discrimination based upon gender. The church has a long history of misogyny. The understanding of why this is, is not as important as stopping the behavior. Just as it isn't as important to know why the alcoholic drinks as it is for the one with that problem just to stop drinking.

There may be as many reasons for trying to oppress women as there are those who invest their lives in the perpetuation of the lies these oppressions are founded upon. Feminists are choosing to name the lies and hold accountable those in power who continue to try to keep women in certain designated, segregated places in order to keep the best places for themselves. Feminists seek to name the injustices that have existed in the church structures and to help establish an ethic of caring that is neither paternalistic nor oppressive.

Carol Lakey Hess is hopeful that the church is the community for girls to be nurtured into positive mature well adjusted faithful adults. I share her hopefulness. I would not have stayed within the structures of the church if I had not held this hope. "Caring families and communities of faith, specifically the church, can make a difference" is the positive statement that concludes her book, Caretakers of Our Common House.¹ Hess admonishes all, women along with men to celebrate the fullness of life in community by saying:

¹ Hess, Caretakers, 246.

no to the dehumanization of girls in theology, the biblical witness, ours and other cultures, communities of faith, and unjust families. When our daughters refuse to be silenced and resist expectations for compliance, let us be there.²

It would be another whole work to take the church to task for the wrongs it has visited on women and continues to uphold. It is enough to say that the church has been both a powerful force for good and evil in regards to the treatment and the valuing of women. Women and men can realize the call to justice and love especially within the support of community life, where gender differences can be fully appreciated and valued for the resources they are in reminding us that good and evil are not traits exclusive to either but inherent in all. By learning to value one another, the checks and balances to call all of us into account will be clarified and remain in place.

Valuing Women

One of the most helpful contributions feminism has been successful in establishing on many fronts is that women, though speaking in a different voice, have much to contribute to the welfare of the human family. Because women value the support of the community, are relational and are at home in collaborative settings, is it any wonder that St. Thérèse found the setting necessary to her development in the society of sisters in the convent? Here she would be free of the need to be forever translating her ideas into the systematic, theological language of men. She was free to write her Story of a Soul in the narrative form as though she were speaking to her mother, her sisters.

² Ibid.

Referring back to the chart, **Two Distinct Voices** on page sixty-eight, it is clear to see that feminism as constructed in the twentieth century was how Thérèse wrote in the nineteenth century and that it is alive and well and applicable into the twenty-first century.

Learning to Hear

As women have found a voice, albeit a different voice, the obvious implication is to be heard: to be listened to, acknowledged, taken seriously, understood. In becoming a partner in the dialogues of decision making and teaching, in research, or theology, new ways of hearing are necessary. One old way was, "Alright, you have had your say now sit down and be quiet." I call this the way of the patriarchs. It is not hearing. It is a form of oppression to discount and ignore the legitimate ideas of others.

Other ways of excluding women's voices from being heard are too numerous to list, but a few are: changing the time and place of "open meetings" and not getting the word out to the unwanted, using parliamentary procedures to keep discussions from moving forward; tabling motions, going into executive session, adjourning the meetings. These are a few of the shenanigans I recall. But one of the least appreciated was pretending to be helpful with no real intention of being sincere.

Hearing means not reframing the work of women into the language of the patriarchy and then claiming the credit for the original thinking. Perception is crucial here. For example in studies done where men are not used to hearing women speak, one woman's voice is perceived as a lot of women.³ The criticism that women are taking over

³ Hess, Caretakers, 107.

may in fact be that a woman has made a contribution and men fear that a small number are becoming a majority.

Carol Hess points out that from Dale Spender's work that "talkativeness of women has been argued in comparison not with men but with *silence*.⁴"

Learning to hear requires creative, critical listening. It will require true communication, involving give and take on everyone's part. Women and men together will hear yet even newer ways to construct thinking and the applications of new ways of being people of justice and care. Eliza Doolittle, in My Fair Lady sang to Freddy Eynsford-Hill, "Don't Talk of Love, Show Me." Learning to hear requires mutually satisfactory results beyond the right words. In addition to rhetoric Feminist Caring seeks tangible, mutually beneficial reconstruction of society. Rules against plagiarism would of course remain in place. Feminist caring requires acts of caring congruent with the words of care.

Giving Credit Where Credit Is Due

Men still have a great deal of difficulty hearing women. Let me illustrate with a true story. At an annual church Christmas party, primarily attended by adult couples the game of Charades was the entertainment. If a woman called out the answer it was ignored. Men could not hear unless they said the answer. It was not a case of a woman's voice being too soft or too high; men just were unused to, or incapable or unwilling to

⁴ Ibid., 107, quoting Dale Spender.

hear if a woman called out the right answer. Now this seemed very curious to me because the men did acknowledge when the women got the wrong answers.

The men must have heard the correct answers though, because with in one or two more incorrect guesses if a man called out the same correct answer as a woman had guessed it was recognized. It was almost as though, if they wanted to keep playing the women had to ignore this behavior and just keep feeding the right answers to the men.

Here is another example of a similar phenomenon. Pope John Paul II chooses to praise Thérèse for ““achieving results very close to the doctrine of Second Vatican Council in chapter eight of the Constitution *Lumen Gentium* (1964) and to what I myself taught in the Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* of 25 March 1987’ (DAS, 3).”⁵ When one publishes ideas that have been read which precede the publications of another credit must be given to the original author. Failing to do this correctly is plagiarism. Many of Thérèse’s ideas were published long before Vatican II. And to claim that her work was close to his is an indulgence in a strange understanding of time. His thinking is influenced by hers, not vice versa.

Pope John Paul II, along with a parade of popes who came before him, hailed Thérèse. But he did not give her the credit due to her for her influence upon the theologians that preceded the vision and the work of the Second Vatican Council. Her emphasis of the scriptures in the hands of all, her understanding of the power of God at hand and accessible through prayer (asking), scripture (study for wisdom), and practical application of love, (the way of childhood) influenced millions: popes, cardinals, bishops and the laity.

⁵ Bryden, “Saints and Stereotypes,” 5.

Hans Urs von Balthasar considered one of the outstanding Catholic theologians of today, along with many others concurs with the thinking of Pius XI “that Thérèse is the greatest saint of modern times.” He articulates what others understand who read Thérèse that her writings and her life are inseparable; they are her doctrine, as she “opens up new vistas on the Gospels.”⁶ Balthasar writes that she saw her vocation as an apostle to the apostles, and that

her mission to the Church...is primarily concerned with the relation between contemplation and action. In a word, the mystery of *contemplation as action*. [Balthasar’s emphasis]⁷

.....

...Thérèse is the first to rid contemplation of its Neoplatonic relics; [individualistic] this fact alone is sufficient to guarantee her place in the history of theology. In fact...she has substituted the notion of fruitfulness for that of effectiveness. She is the first to see quite clearly that action is not simply an effect of overflowing contemplation...This is the sense in which contemplation is more active than action, if the latter is taken to mean external deeds.⁸

.....

The ideal for Thérèse did not consist in alternating from one to the other, or in balancing them, but in perfecting the two attitudes simultaneously. Whereas, Augustine loved to separate action and contemplation, Mary and Martha, Peter and John, as types of earthly and heavenly life, Thérèse cannot imagine heaven except in terms of their unity. Unlike any previous saint she regards heaven as the scene for her most intense missionary activity—‘It is not happiness which attracts me...but Love alone! To love, to be loved and to return to earth to make Love loved.’ ‘I wish to spend my heaven in doing good upon earth...No, I shall not be able to take any rest until the end of the world.’ ‘I feel that my mission is soon to begin, my mission of making God loved as I love him...to give my little way to souls.’⁹

⁶ Balthasar, “Thérèse of Lisieux: The Church and the Contemplative Life,” In Hans Urs von Balthasar, compiled by Martin Redfern (London: Sheed and Ward, 1972), 37.

⁷ Ibid., 47.

⁸ Ibid., 53-54.

⁹ Ibid., 60-61.

In the introduction to the series on Theologians Today, Martin Redfern describes the purposes of his work to

provide a ...representative introduction to the thought of an outstanding Catholic theologian...and official Church teaching...mainly to emphasize the close connection between the theologian's writing and the teaching of Vatican II, I have keyed the articles to the four major documents of that Council—the four Constitutions, on the Church, on Revelation, on the Liturgy, and on the Church in the Modern World.¹⁰

Using Redfern's "key" then, Thérèse's work would appear to open the door to the work of Vatican II. Her work is certainly congruent to those same "four Constitutions: Church, Revelation, Liturgy, and the Church in the Modern World," to recap Redfern.

In this case, valuing a woman's contribution as laying the foundation for the work of Vatican II, Thérèse's little way of child-like humility, her enthusiasm and commitment to reforming the priesthood, daily study of the Scripture in her own language, and the absolute trust and honor she lavished on God are expressions of her way of empowerment for all. These are enormous implications for women and men.

Balthasar, who is also a Thérésian scholar, makes this insightful contribution.

The theology of women has never been taken seriously, nor has it been received by the corpus. After the message of Lisieux, at last it will have to be taken into consideration in the present-day reconstruction of dogmatic theology.¹¹

The implications of applying an ethic of caring *and* justice, as formulated by St. Thérèse in her writings, such as in her prayer, "Act of Oblation to Merciful Love,"

In the evening of this life, I shall appear before you with empty hands, for I do not ask you, Lord to count my works. All our justice is stained in your eyes. I wish, then, to be clothed in our own Justice and to receive from your Love the Eternal possession of Yourself,¹²

¹⁰ Ibid., 7-8.

¹¹ Gaucher, Story of a Life, 214.

¹² Thérèse of Lisieux, Prayers of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, trans. Kane, 54.

are a powerful combination for the church to employ today. She has joined God's Justice-Love in such a way that she has reframed the love or justice dialectic. Don Juan in Hell from Act 3 of George Bernard Shaw's play, Man and Superman comes to mind. He says to the Old Woman who thinks there has been a mistake and that she does not belong in hell for all eternity, purgatory perhaps, but not hell,

No: You were fully and clearly warned. For your bad deeds, vicarious atonement, mercy without justice. For your good deeds, justice without mercy. We have many good people here.¹³

Literature has understood what many in the church have failed to grasp. Justice without Love is no better for people than Love without Justice and women and men are all implicated, saved or damned depending upon the interrelationships of both.

Here is a letter written by Pope John Paul I, while he was still Patriarch of Venice on the centenary of her birth:

Dear little Thérèse,

I was seventeen years old when I read your Autobiography. For me it was like a bolt from the blue. 'Story of a little flower' you called it. To me it seemed like the story of a 'steel bar' because of the will power, the courage, and the decision that shone from it. Once you had chosen the path of complete devotion to God, nothing then could stand in your way: no illness, no external contradictions, no inner shadows or uncertainty.¹⁴

Pope John Paul I gives a better example of the powerful affect of her mission and his understanding of it. Pope John Paul II admires her, names her Doctor of the Church perhaps because he has appropriated her mission without realizing it. The issues of

¹³ George Bernard Shaw, Man and Superman, (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 125.

¹⁴ Thérèse of Lisieux, General Correspondence, Vol 1, 6. Signed, Albino Luciani.

gender equality and a balance of power do not exist in Rome with regards to women in the areas of leadership, and the priesthood. Men have a long history of using the genius of women and renaming women's contributions as their own work. There needs to be an accountability of giving credit where it is due. Anything less is injustice. It is wrong. It is sinful. It is evil.

Thérèse directly addressed Pope Leo XIII. Pope Pius XI called her the "Star of his pontificate" and beatified and canonized her in much less time than is prescribed by tradition and canon law. So she has had tremendous influence on the patriarchy, but there is still evidence of the difficulty in naming her contribution accurately. Pope John Paul II did comment on the peculiarity of her being a woman.

Thérèse is a *woman* [emphasis his] who in approaching the Gospel knew how to grasp its hidden wealth with the practicality and deep resonance of life and wisdom which belongs to the feminine genius.¹⁵

Empowering All God's Children

Another important aspect of Thérèse's work is that it is so well received by both women and men. And here too, she is in line with feminist pedagogy. Where western thought is exclusionary to so many her approach is welcoming to all. She recognizes that each person has value in God's eyes and is therefore not to be made an object of ridicule by others.

¹⁵ Bryden, "Saints and Stereotypes," 6, (DAS, 4).

According to Thérèse's little way we are not merely to tolerate the difficult and the annoying people within our own circle, we are to love them. We are to go out of our way and carry them in like lost sheep by the same power of Love that is present in the incarnation that seeks us, imperfect as we all are. Is this not an ethic of care? It certainly seeks to connect us all into community.

The implications of feminist caring apply to the hierarchy of the church as well as to the physically needy. Calling one another into accountability means that the powerful must not only listen to the less powerful they must also recognize who comes up with revolutionary thinking and new ways of working together that are in agreement with the Scripture's mandate to free the oppressed, to do justice and to love kindness.

Admittedly, Thérèse's theology is not systematic, but by reading just her brief Story of a Soul, individuals and the bureaucrats of the Church are able to recognize her contributions to the contemporary church. What could exemplify God's caring more than reminding all that in addition to the justice of God there is the care of God.

Thérèse reminds us of the truth of God's gentleness that has been there all along but missed or at least underemphasized far too long. God cares for us as a mother nursing her child at the breast and dandles (to move, as a baby, up and down in one's arms or on one's knee in affectionate play, according to Webster) us lovingly, carefully, and playfully. Thérèse is correct, then, we are the play companions of God.

We are the little children of her little way.

CHAPTER 6

ST. THÉRÈSE'S LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT:

SUMMARY and CONCLUSIONS

I Want All

In the introduction, Chapter 1, I set out to name the significance of the life of St. Thérèse of Lisieux by asking what was unique about her life, her writings and the mission she outlined and applied to her own life, which has captured the hearts and the imagination of millions.

To answer the question raised in Chapter 1 and explored in Chapter 4, “what made her different as a woman” that allowed or shaped her thinking and her theology, was that she contributed a missing voice, precisely the voice of woman’s experience, to the needs of modern women and men that made a giant step from the confines of western thought to the different voice of women’s concerns for care and relationship. Thérèse set the stage for what was to come.

As early as the time of preparation for her first Holy Communion, Thérèse declared that she did “not want to be a saint by halves.” In her anticipation of what was needed for the renewal of the vitality of the church, she said, “I choose everything.”¹ In this instance although she was referring to choosing how to respond to God’s invitation to life, this was how she characterized her whole approach to life. Aim for the highest and

¹ Thérèse of Lisieux, Story of a Soul, trans. Day, 13.

forget about yourself could have been her motto. She chooses to be everything she could be for her love of God and the church.

She was never luke-warm in her approach to any aspect of her life. She was a woman of real passion for life. Her courage, combined with exuberance, were choices she made in how she lived even in the face of the cold and hunger of the convent life many months of the year. These discomforts combined with the pain of tuberculosis show only a portion of her application of choosing joy and love as her focus for life.

Through her own commitment to her theology of “the little way,” undergirded by the support and recognition of her sisters, Marie, Agnes (Pauline) and Céline she developed the trust and the voice she needed to write her story, in the community of women.

Because of an evening by the fire in the winter of 1895, when Thérèse was telling stories to entertain the sisters as she often did at the free time following the evening meal, her godmother, Sister Marie turned to Mother Agnes with the inspiration that since they already knew that Thérèse’s life was to be short, that she begin to write her poems and her life story. Through the strong suggestion of Sr. Marie, Mother Agnes agreed. Sr. Thérèse thought they were teasing her. Mother Agnes was not joking. “I order you to write for me all your childhood memories.”²

This is another clear example of the collaborative effort of women working relationally to achieve the work that would not have been likely to have happened without the interaction of community. Thérèse writes that the double strength of Mother

² Gaucher, Story of a Life, 143.

Agnes' relationship to her, allows her to "confide the Story of my Soul."³ To her godmother, Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart, "doubly a sister to me,"⁴ she pours out the secrets entrusted to her by Jesus.

And so it is that the world has the diary of the future Saint Thérèse of Lisieux of the Child Jesus and the Sacred Face. At her Mass of Canonization Pope Pius XI described her life as

penetrated with the Gospel teaching and (she) put it into practice in her daily life. Yet more, she taught the way of spiritual childhood by her words and example to the novices of her Monastery, and she has revealed it to all by her writings, which have been spread all over the world and which none can read without returning and re-reading them with great profit.⁵

The canonization took place at St. Peter's cathedral in Rome on May 17, 1925 with 60,000 people attending. That evening an estimated 500,000 pilgrims came to St. Peter's square.⁶ This was the Vatican's first worldwide radio broadcast of the pope's homily and events. It was her immense popularity that has shortened the time usually required for the beatification and canonization. Her book, *World War I, and the helpful effectiveness of her story in the hands of soldiers on both sides*, along with her photographs and the radio broadcast all combined to make her the most well known saint of the modern age.

She influenced the religious community and the secular world as well because she was accessible, honest, easy to understand, and helpful. The time was ripe for the caring voice of a woman who believed God was present and loving and a God who cares

³ Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, trans. Day, 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁵ *Ibid.*, xv-xvi.

⁶ Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, trans. Clarke (1975), 28

through the worst of life's doubts, pains and troubles. Thérèse did not invent anything about God that was new. What was revolutionary was her rediscovery of this necessary aspect of God's caring nature. Because she read scripture from a woman's point of view, a woman's experience, she was able to take notice of the caring aspects of God, not as something peripheral but as central to the whole human family. The ethic of care that feminists discovered out of their own experience mirrors God's combination of Justice- and Love espoused by Thérèse.

While the family was still intact and living in Alençon, Leonie decided to give all her doll things to her sisters. She asked the younger girls to choose what they wanted. After thinking for a moment Thérèse writes, "I choose all!"⁷ Then she goes on to say that this story from her childhood sums up her whole life. In her chosen path to sainthood, she was free to "choose" how to respond to God's call to which she again cried out, "My God 'I choose all!' I don't want to be a *saint* by halves,... 'I choose all' that You will!"⁸

A Warrior

Thérèse never gave up her courageous fight to be a warrior for the church. When she said she was a warrior she was referring to her war against evil, apathy and ignorance in matters of our relationship to God and to each other. Once again her mission which she stated at her profession as her reason for coming to Carmel was, "I came to save souls and especially to pray for priests."⁹

⁷ Ibid., 27.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Thérèse of Lisieux, Story of a Soul, trans. Clarke (1975), 149.

She fought what she called a fog of nothingness when her only weapon was to “sing simply what I WANT TO BELIEVE”¹⁰ until the fog lifted. She battled against the tuberculosis that was consuming her body. She was intrepid in her campaign against the establishment of the church in order to enter Carmel while she was so young. In the convent she fought off the cold and damp of Normandy’s winters, sleep deprivation, and the hunger associated with a very limited diet and eating regime.

Her weapons were her laughter and wit and her ability to choose how she would respond in order to be a blessing where she was. In July, when Mother Agnès mentioned to Thérèse that her book would “very well go one day to the Holy Father, Thérèse laughed: *Et nunc et semper!*”¹¹

It is not easy to understand the constraints of silence required of a Carmelite sister, especially when she was living in community with her own dear biological sisters. She made conscious effort not to show favoritism to the other three girls with whom she had been raised, closely following the Carmelite order to show no favoritism.

Thérèse employed the courage of a warrior when she defied convention and with resolve, deliberation and forethought addressed the pope in Rome. She could discern when to be obedient and when to be fiercely independent, always serving God rather than convention if a choice between the two had to be made.

In her instructions to the novices she could be severe if it were necessary. She knew that a teacher must be fearless in pointing out to students where they are wrong

¹⁰ Ibid., 214.

¹¹ Gaucher, *Story of a Life*, 196. n.1 “An example of Thérèse’s puns: In the French there is a play on words, Holy Father, Saint-Père. Thérèse replies: ‘Now and for ever’, using the Latin phrase (tr.).

both academically and in their behavior. She stressed the absolute importance of the truth.

If I am not loved, that's just too bad! I tell the whole truth, and if anyone doesn't wish to know the truth, let her not come looking for me.¹²

She drew her direction and bravery from her understanding of God's word as set forth in scripture. Even her diligence, perseverance and genius in regular reading of the Bible and appropriating it for herself were almost unheard-of for Catholics of her day. She took charge of her own destiny and desires and set forth a way for others to follow.

In so doing she discovered how to take the hill, so to speak. She would remain like a child, humble, truthful, brave and full of courage. Whether here on earth or in the time that follows she had decided to claim her battlefield, her work: to pray for priests, to save souls for Christ, and to spend her heaven here on earth to accomplish her mission, with all the confidence of a general. She faced every battle of life set before her with her way of confidence and love.

A Priest

She set out to preach the Gospel on all five continents. How would she accomplish this? With her autobiography, The Story of a Soul, she had already established her homily, her catechism. What had worked for her in her fight against disease, doubts, and extreme discomfort of life would work for others as well. What she had learned in instructing her novices would work for people of all walks of life.

In Chapter 3 the emphasis shifted to her application of the components of her marriage of faith, bible study, prayer and the application of this powerful combination to

¹² Thérèse of Lisieux, Her Last Conversations, trans. Clarke, 38.

her daily life. She developed “the little way” of childhood, which kept her humble and reliant upon a nurturing, caring God of Love. And yet this lofty, love relationship of God and people, God with us, is precisely what enables us to embody an ethic of care.

Because God cares for us we are empowered to throw off everything which would prevent us from responding to others, lovingly. Thérèse saw her role of caring for souls as extending not only to priests and to all five continents as a missionary; she also longed to be a priest. She earnestly desired to feed the lambs not only by proclaiming the Word but by offering up the bread and body of the Eucharist as well.

She envisioned Mary, the Mother of Jesus, as presiding at the table of the Eucharist and longed to follow her in this capacity. Because Thérèse uses clear language and is so honest in her writing, it is difficult to see how the very ones who have raised her to such heights as Saint and Doctor of the Church still maintain that

the church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church's faithful.¹³

In an article entitled “St. Thérèse and the Priesthood” Thomas McKeon writes that when Thérèse writes she feels the vocation of THE PRIEST, she is just indulging in “wishful thinking.”¹⁴ I strongly disagree with both his eminence, Pope John Paul II and Rev. McKeon. What blatant hypocrisy. I see inconsistency in making a woman a doctor of the church and yet with-holding ordination on the grounds of gender.

While commending her for her understanding of Mary, Mother of Victories, how can Pope John Paul II have ignored Thérèse's last completed poem, “Why I Love You, O

¹³ Franciscan Friars of the Immaculate, St. Thérèse, 74, quoting a declaration of Pope John Paul II, May 22, 1994.

¹⁴ Ibid., 76.

Mary!'"? She composed the twenty-five stanzas, completing the poem in May of 1897 when she was already extremely ill. She considered this poem part of her "very important work." Donald Kinney writes that it may have been her "crowning achievement."¹⁵ In stanza twenty-three she writes, Mary ...To me you seem like a priest at the altar..."¹⁶ and in the last stanza, she concludes with,

It's evening now!...and now I want to sing on your lap, Mary, why I love you, And to go on saying that I am your child!....¹⁷

Like mother, like daughter, she sees herself presiding at Christ's table. St.

Thérèse writes of her feelings when she is the nun presiding at the Divine Office, leading the prayers at the Table,

Reciting the prayers out loud...I was proud because I remembered that the priest said the same prayers during Mass, and I had the right, like him, to pray aloud before the Blessed Sacrament, giving the blessing and the absolutions, reading the Gospel when I was chantress.¹⁸

I am haunted by the melancholy in her words which show a rare pathos when she speaks:

Don't you see that God is going to take me at an age when I would not have had the time to become a priest. If I had been able to become a priest, it would have been in this month of June, at this ordination that I would have received holy orders. So in order that I may regret nothing, God is allowing me to be sick; I wouldn't have been able to present myself for ordination, and I would have died before having exercised my ministry.¹⁹

And perhaps most telling of all, she says, "Well, like Joan of Arc, I say 'the will of God will be done despite men's jealousy.'"²⁰ St. Thérèse still claims her right to the priesthood in her own words and no twisting them or re-interpreting them can change her

¹⁵ St. Thérèse, Poetry, trans. Kinney, 211; also see Last Conversations, trans. Clarke, 233.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Kinney, 220.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Thérèse of Lisieux, Last Conversations, 137.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 260.

²⁰ Gaucher, Story of a Life, 196.

desires, hopes, her vision which is still influencing the church. Based on work of Carter Heyward, Thérèse too is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, Heb.5:6-11.

It is Thérèse's capacity to "keep on keeping on" that illustrates her wonderful ability to teach and to preach and to write of how she came to be able to balance power and humility, a very youthful, childlike zest for life even in the face of death and disappointments. Her tremendous influence on the church springs from this kind of multi-tasking that women are so adept at accomplishing for the care and the good of the community.

An Apostle

In Chapter 4 the relevance of gender was explored. Laying a foundation of the work of women thinkers and recent women's history, a structure was designed upon which to view Thérèse's methodology from a feminist perspective. Building upon the work of Carol Gilligan, that women have a different voice and a different way of approaching problem solving, St. Thérèse's theology was examined to see if writing almost a hundred years before Gilligan's research; Thérèse was operating from this different stance. A case was made that she did indeed approach her mission from a woman's way of working.

Was Thérèse truly an apostle? "That depends," to use Gilligan's terminology. Webster's Dictionary²¹ defines an apostle as one sent on a mission to preach the Good News, one with authority to confirm the teachings of the New Testament, one who

²¹ Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, s.v. "apostle."

initiates a great moral reform. A case could be made that yes, Thérèse is an apostle as she wanted to be. Before she entered Carmel she prayed all day to the Holy Spirit to help her grow from a “timid child” into her destiny of “an apostle of apostles.”²²

Up until her pilgrimage to Rome the “principal aim of Carmelite Reform was a mystery”²³ to Thérèse. Travel will broaden one, and it was on this pilgrimage that she discovered that there were wonderful priests as she had always known, but her eyes were opened to the lukewarm and those “still subject to human weakness.”²⁴ She decided that her vocation would be to pray for the priests to “preserve the salt of the earth...to be the apostles of the Apostles....”²⁵

Thérèse Martin’s gender played a significant role in who she was and how she did theology. She grew up in a home with all daughters. It would be interesting to see what a developmental psychologist would do with a research project of families with all girls. She spent all of her adult life in the company of women although she enjoyed corresponding with her spiritual brothers.

Although research to better understand how women think and act has begun, it is still in its infancy. Even so, Thérèse’s way of telling her story, teaching and writing, do integrate the areas of her own life. Her writing is experiential. Her style is narrative. Her work was collaborative. Her sisters encouraged her, and interacted with her to draw out the handbook that many have called the greatest book on spirituality of modern times, and considered by many to be “a jewel of Christian literature.”²⁶

²² Thérèse of Lisieux, Story of a Soul, trans. Day, 73.

²³ Ibid., 85.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Thérèse of Lisieux, Last Conversations, trans. Clarke, 233.

In comparing Thérèse's methodology with the chart on page sixty-eight it is clear that she aligns with the voice of women. Therefore her gender is at the very core of who she is and how she writes. None of the male Doctors of the Church contributed the combination of the gifts Thérèse has given, precisely because women do have a different voice with which they speak.

Carol Lakey Hess in her chapter "Rebuilding Our Mother's House" writes that caretaking and being in genuine relationship require empathetic caring, real dialogue based in truth, and prophetic caring which confronts and challenges situations and leadership, even ourselves, until we have brought in the new "concrete communities" rather than just "lofty visions."²⁷ Although Jesus does teach going the extra mile we must discern when the prophetic call is to shake the dust from our sandals and if it is once again the time to turn the other cheek of sacrifice or is it the time to turn over tables of injustice. Emphatic caring is never a one-way endeavor. I would add to Prof. Hess's argument that intense dialogue and probing conversations must lead to somewhere new. When the hard work of constructive talking appears to be making progress, unless measurable improvements result this kind of dialogue merely serves as a vent for voicing pain and injustice.

Thérèse is being prophetic when she says her vocation is the priesthood and that she is an Apostle to the Apostles. If one carries her thinking to a logical conclusion then the same church that proclaimed her Doctor of the Church, if they are listening and entering into an ethic of caring, will also in time find a way to ordain Thérèse to the priesthood she so ardently desired. This would not be the first time such rites were

²⁷ Hess, Caretakers, 90.

bestowed posthumously, nor would it be the first time the Catholic Church had ordained women.

Perhaps women's way of using "tentative speech"²⁸ can be seen as one skill that leads to community building by way of keeping communication open. While Thérèse is valued as one who helps with spiritual progress, her gifts for revolutionizing the politics of ordination are discounted, unrecognized or ignored by most. Hess's use of prophetic caring says to me that the people of the Book must continue to confront the power structures in order to maintain an honest functioning community.

St. Thérèse's caretaking of souls was heartfelt as she poured out her soul to pass on her experience of faith to the community out of her experiences in community. Thérèse's frequent use of sacrifice, which will not be developed as a part of this study, does often translate as her way of dealing with anger. Suffice it to say that anger was not an acceptable practice in Thérèse's community, suffering was. She suffered many pains and humiliations; the inability to become a priest, to her, was more excruciating than dying of tuberculosis.

A Doctor of the Church

In Chapter 5, I set out to show that the implications of feminist caring are far reaching and life changing to individuals and to institutions. When the work of St. Thérèse is placed next to the research of twentieth century feminists there are important congruencies in approaches. For her contributions to the church Pope John Paul II declared St. Thérèse a Doctor of the Church in 1997.

²⁸ Ibid., 107.

In his homily delivered at St. Peter's square on Church Mission Sunday, on the occasion of her enrollment to the honored list of Doctors of the Church His Eminence, John Paul said she had

achieved what the Second Vatican Council emphasized in teaching that the church is missionary by nature... This is why I have chosen this missionary Sunday to proclaim St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face *a doctor of the universal Church; a woman, a young person, a contemplative.*²⁹ [his emphasis]

John Paul II goes on to proclaim that she is a "reference point" because she "sheds new light...and deeper understanding"³⁰ of Jesus and the faith. On this auspicious date Thérèse while being the youngest doctor of the church showed great maturity, and the pope called her one of the great spiritual masters. Here is one place where I experience a shift from the description of her as teacher, apostle, missionary, doctor to inserting a fulcrum to relegate her away from the revolutionary reform work she set in motion into the realm of the spirit where men are more comfortable with woman's giftedness. Then he continues getting back to the very practicality of her teachings,

St. Thérèse of Lisieux did not only grasp and describe the profound truth of Love as the center and heart of the Church, but in her short life she lived it intensely. It is precisely this *convergence of doctrine and concrete experience*, of truth and life, of teaching and practice, which shines with particular brightness in this saint, and which makes her an attractive model especially for young people and for those who are seeking true meaning for their life.³¹

Thérèse herself was fulfilling the prophetic desire of her vocation to become a doctor of the church.³² The pope concludes his sermon stating that she was selected because she fulfilled a specific need: to speak to the people into the new millennium of

²⁹ Franciscan Friars, *St. Thérèse*, 67.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 70.

³² Thérèse of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, trans. Clarke (1975), 192.

the little way which lay within the grasp of everyone.³³ In his prayer at the close of the homily Pope John Paul II thanks God for “making her an exceptional witness and teacher of life for the whole Church!”³⁴ She is hailed as a model and guide, and therefore a mentor, a mother of souls.

Mother of Souls

Referring back to Pope John Paul II's statement that Thérèse had already achieved the emphasis of Vatican II it is important to get the horse before the cart. When one is the first to accomplish something of that significance the term needs to be the pioneer of, or more appropriately the Mother of Vatican II.

In this so called modern age, one of the great problems of people is coping with despair and feelings of alienation. Who among us has not experienced at one time or another the feelings expressed in the old spiritual, *Sometimes I feel like a Motherless child a long way from home*. Thérèse knew these feelings well and sought to comfort those who followed after her with the experience of a mother's love found in scripture and in the presence of the comfort of God's Spirit of Love and Wisdom.

Although when asked what she would like to be called after her death she replied “petite Thérèse” she was actually considered quite tall for the women of her time. She was a playwright, a poet, an actress, and artist. In the vernacular of my mother's day she was a real knock-out. In her early twenties a character sketch which was sent to a neighboring convent described her honestly as being

tall and robust,...hiding the wisdom, perfection and discernment of a fifty-year-old...always composed and in perfect control of herself in everything

³³ Franciscan Friars, St. Thérèse, 71.

³⁴ Ibid.

and with herself. An innocent little thing to whom you would give communion without confession, but her head is full of tricks to play on whoever she pleases. A mystic, a comic, she has everything going for her — she knows how to make you weep with devotion or die with laughter at recreation.³⁵

It is fascinating to read Dorothy Day, of Catholic Worker fame describe her evolution from considering Thérèse's book, "colorless, monotonous, too small in fact for my notice"³⁶ to becoming so influenced by the real depth of Thérèse's work that she took on the task of writing her biography of Thérèse so that her audience of the 65,000 subscribers to *The Catholic Worker*³⁷ could have the advantage of reading about Thérèse's victory over adversity and hopelessness.

Day felt that many people, who had no association with any church, as well as the devout, could benefit from exposure to the life of this modern day saint who employed such balance. She was the "little grain of sand" and "her name was written in heaven."³⁸ Here is a Mother of Souls who can join us in the sand box at play and also use her heaven here on earth to give her LITTLE WAY to souls.³⁹

At the blessing of the new Basilica at Lisieux, on July 11, 1937, Cardinal Pacelli who was later to be named Pope Pius XII spoke.

...a little Carmelite who had hardly reached adult age has conquered in less than half a century innumerable hosts of disciples. Doctors of the law have become children at her school; the Supreme Shepherd has exalted her and prays to her with humble and assiduous supplications; and even at this moment from one end of the earth to the other, there are millions of souls whose interior life has received the beneficent influence of the little book, *The Autobiography*.⁴⁰

³⁵ Gaucher, *Story of a Life*, 126.

³⁶ Dorothy Day, *Thérèse*, (Notre Dame, Ind.: Fides Publishers Association, 1960), viii.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, xii.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Gaucher, *Story of a Life*, 197.

⁴⁰ Dorothy Day, *Thérèse*, 176.

Here we have a future pope describing the current pope's relation to this woman who was canonized only a dozen years earlier. Look at the language used here, the high and mighty have become "children at her school." It is not amazing that Rome has lifted Thérèse to be a Mother of Souls, but it is perplexing to contemplate why the acceptance stops short of ordination, missing the mark of fulfilling the Golden Rule. What Christian woman would withhold ordination to a man on the basis of gender alone? Therefore it must be only fair for men to use the same standard for women as with themselves as we are neither male nor female in God's jurisdiction.

The political implications of Thérèse's little way have only just begun. She has accomplished much in just over one hundred years refusing heaven. Mother Teresa of Calcutta named herself after St. Thérèse of Lisieux. Listening to Mother Teresa's voice is like a continuation of the voice of St. Thérèse.

It's not how much we do, but how much love we put into the doing.
It's not how much we give, but how much love we put in the giving.

Let there be kindness in your face, in your eyes, in your smile, in the warmth of your greeting...Don't only give your care, but give your heart as well.

The dying, the cripple, the mental, the unwanted, the unloved they are Jesus in disguise.⁴¹

It is easy to see the connection that existed between St. Thérèse of Lisieux and her namesake, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Nobel Peace Prize winner of 1979. Teresa was applying Thérèse's little way to the poorest of the poor in India.

⁴¹ Lani Gjoni, "A Tribute to Mother Teresa," Mother Teresa's Site [on-line posting]; accessed 13 Nov. 2002; available from http://www.drini.com/motherteresa/own_words/left.html.

Certainly St. Thérèse has provided a model of leadership that is much more earthy than one that justifies relegating her to the prayer closet of spirituality. Dorothy Day and Mother Teresa are just two larger than life examples of how much good may result from the application of St Thérèse's simplicity, humility and Love of Christ to neighbor.

St. Thérèse working within her community has provided the theological framework for reinvigorating a modern understanding of applied mission work. She has girded it securely in the Gospel. Her life is an open book, one might say, that calls Christians to open their Bibles, ("I want to make you read in the book of life, wherein is contained the science of LOVE.")⁴² pray, ask God for guidance with the real difficulties of being a caring human being, then get ready for results.

She promises these results which she calls her shower of roses, or blessings, because God is a God who is trustworthy and true, accessible and the Mother of all who created us into communities to care for and be cared for. It is precisely this inter-related, connectedness that is both necessary and vital to the human family.

When both women and men are unfettered to fully realize their own potential as well as a genuine respect for the destiny of others, the stars will smile. When Thérèse expressed her heart's desire, "I want it all" she was being anything but selfish or self aggrandizing. She was bearing her soul and the passion she had for life which she could only fully realize after her death. Thérèse epitomized LOVE,

I understood it was Love alone that made the Church's members act, that if Love ever became extinct, apostles would not preach the Gospel and martyrs would not shed their blood. I understood that LOVE COMPRISED ALL VOCATIONS, THAT LOVE WAS EVERYTHING, THAT IT EMBRACED

⁴² Thérèse of Lisieux, Story of a Soul, trans. Clarke (1975), 187.

ALL TIMES AND PLACES...IN A WORD, THAT IT WAS ETERNAL!...Yes, I have found my place in the Church and it is You, O my God, who have given me this place; in the heart of the Church, my Mother, I shall be *Love*. Thus I shall be everything, and thus my dream will be realized.⁴³

Finally, a woman's model of leadership was employed by Thérèse. The feminist research by Gilligan with an application to Biblical study and deep community caring as outlined by Hess combine to inform the work that lies ahead for the church in continuing to live out the Gospel mandate to love one another, dearly.

Thérèse's humble way is a feminist model for leadership and renewal for the church because it is Biblical and congruent with the teachings of Jesus which were also relational, narrative, collaborative and deeply caring. When we ask ourselves did Jesus speak more about justice or love, the answer must be love. Once again, however, it is not a case of an either/or dilemma, but a both and God *of* Justice and God *is* Love.

After entering Carmel, Thérèse wrote all her letters with a heading, **J.M.J.T.** usually followed by **Jesus +**. The four initials represent the relationship of Jesus, Mary, Joseph, and Teresa of Avila who was the Mother of Carmelite reform, and were Thérèse's ever present reminder of relationship and reform.

The major focus of this dissertation has been to show that Thérèse, the little flower, is a mighty woman indeed, and to present a strong case that St. Thérèse's work was the model for reform and renewal of the Second Vatican Council. Therefore, taking Thérèse's model of the little way is an ideal approach for leadership and life itself. She considered the ability to become once again like children, our sacred work and the mission of the Church. Here again the prototype for Vatican II is exemplified. Through

⁴³ Ibid., 194.

her revelations, the Church and the Liturgy (literally, the Work of the People), Mission and Proclaiming the Good News were gifts she gave to the Church in 1898 when the first copies of The Story of a Soul were published.

Gaucher, in his article “Thérèse Today,” writes,

God always granted her desires, and will grant this one when and how he wishes. The essential point remains that her life and her message, marked by her times but prophetically surpassing them (she announces what will be the great themes of Vatican II), are the most effective antidote to contemporary despair. One day she may be the “Doctor of Hope.”⁴⁴

Thérèse’s lessons are simple enough for all to understand, challenging enough for even the most enlightened, and strong enough to welcome and help everyone in her beginners’ class in the science of Love. No saint by halves, Thérèse shows how she took responsibility for her own desires, all of them. Then she encourages and beckons us to follow the way of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face.

⁴⁴ Guy Gaucher, “Thérèse Today” in Saint Thérèse of Lisieux: Her Life, Times and Teaching, ed. De Meester, 266.

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